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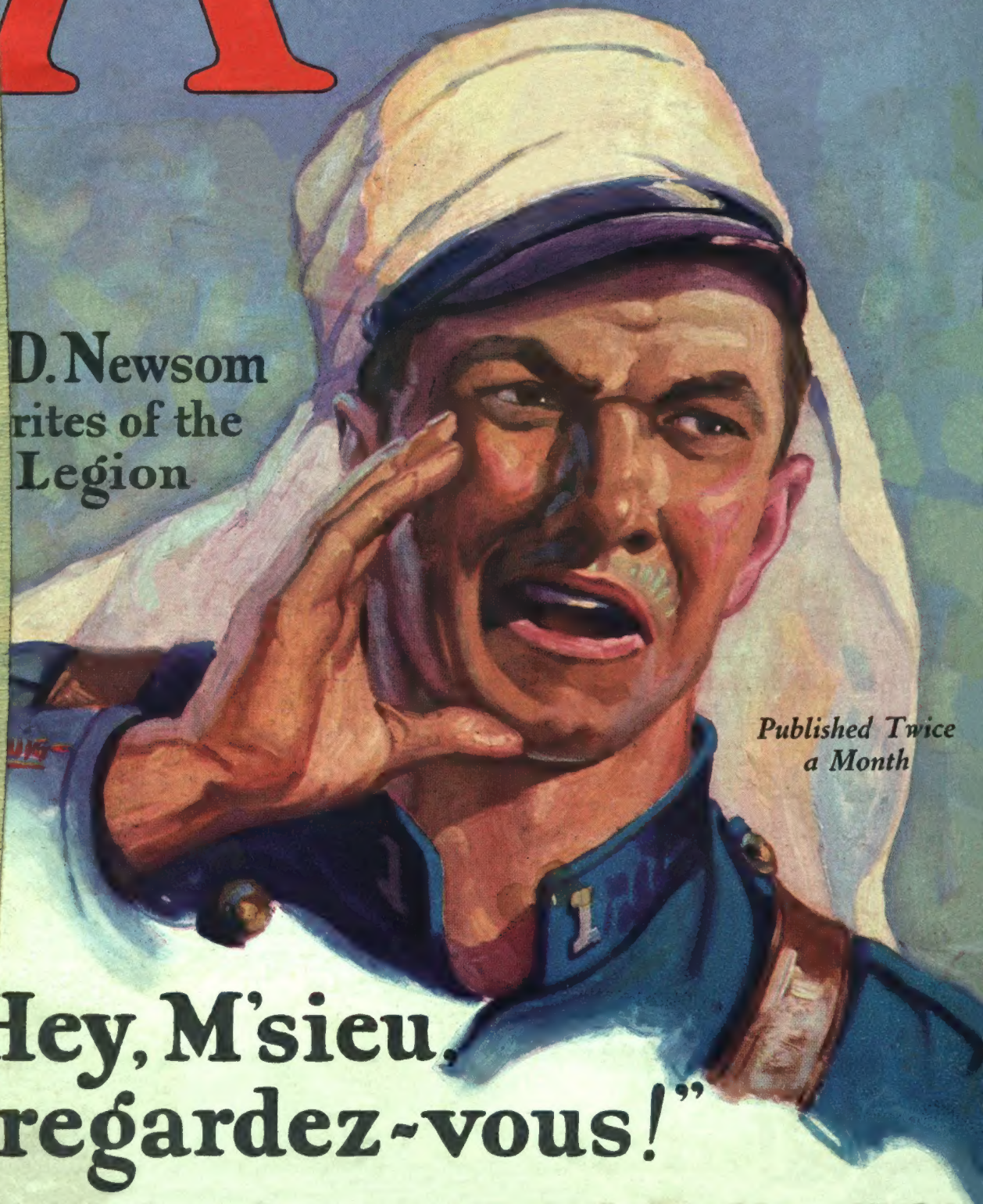
January 1st

Adventure

D. Newsom
rites of the
Legion

Published Twice a Month



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Volume 78 Number 2

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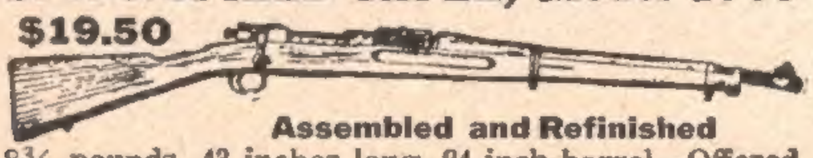

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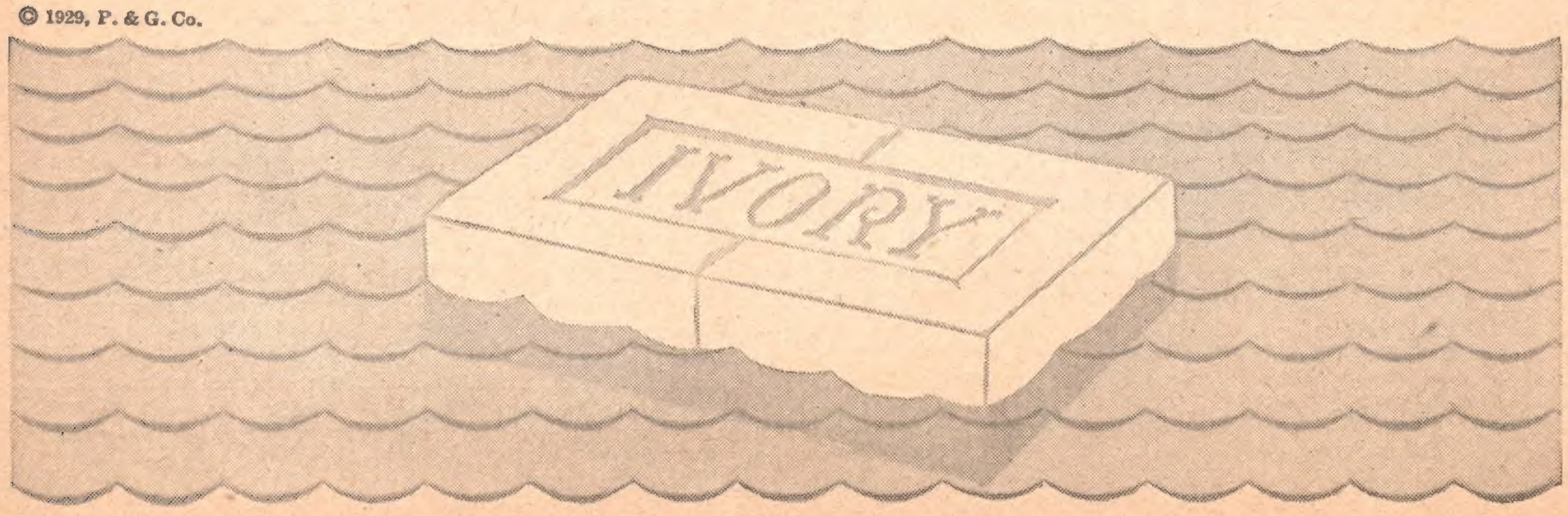

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

CONTENTS

1930 for January 1st

VOL. LXXIII NO. 2

Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

The Cure . . . . . J. D. NEWSOM 2
A Novelette of the French Foreign Legion

Salud, Señor! . . . . . WALT COBURN 22
A Story of Mexican Revolution

Solomon And The Bright Pearl . BILL ADAMS 29
A Story of the California Fruit Country

The John Company . . . . . CHARLES GILSON 36
A Complete Novel of Malaysia

The Spirits of Sumdum . . . . AUGUST EBERHARDT 76
A Story of Alaska

The Ritual Drums of Yoruba . . T. SAMSON MILLER 84

Skirmish . . . . . GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES 86
Reminiscenses of Rustling and Fighting on the Border Line

A Pair of Shoes . . . . . WILLIAM CORCORAN 96
A Story of the Big City

Copra . . . . . CHARLES A. FREEMAN 103

The Four Dud Shells . . . . BARRY LYNDON 104
A Story of the World War

Blackbeard *(A Poem)* . . . . R. E. ALEXANDER 110

Venable's Kid . . . . . LOUIS LACY STEVENSON 112
A Novelette of Father and Son in the Shadow of Crime

Al-Lateef Is Al-Lateef . . . . GEORGE E. HOLT 142
A Story of Morocco

Facts An' Figgers On Women . . WHISKERS BECK 150

Mavericks . . . . . W. C. TUTTLE 152
Part II of a Novel of Hashknife and Sleepy

The Camp-Fire 180 Ask Adventure 186 Trail Ahead 192

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The CURE

"COCKTAILS? Don't make me laugh!" exclaimed Monte Fisher. "Ain't you got a slug of real hooch around this dump? If you have I'll take mine straight. I'm a hard boiled egg, I am, if anybody should want to know. My gullet's lined with tin and I got hair on my chest." He clawed at his flannel shirt. "Want to see the hair on my chest?"

Mourelle shook his head.

"Take a cocktail and don't blather so much about your capillary system," he said impatiently. "Have it marcelled if you're so fond of it."

Instead of one, Fisher took three full glasses and set them up in a row on the occasional table at his elbow.

"Look at the stuff!" he complained. "Salmon colored dish water! Why don't you serve 'em in mugs so's a guy can quench his thirst? Cocktails are a symptom of our decaying civilization. Little drinks for little men. Fire water is what I

A Greenwich Village Poet Joins the French Foreign Legion to Seek Excitement.

A Novelette by

J. D. NEWSOM

crave. Stuff that'll blow off the top of your nut."

"One of those 'll knock you for a loop," Mourelle assured him. "Three, and you'll pass right out. Drink 'em quick, Monte. I'd like to see a strong man laid low."

Fisher tossed back his yellow mane and laughed long and loud. He had strong white teeth and a strong, round chin and a strong, straight nose. From head to foot he was a strong, shaggy, one hundred per cent. he-man. Even his clothes denoted his contempt for the namby-pamby conventions of his fellow creatures. The other guests at Mourelle's party were decently attired according to the informal standards of the American art colony at Montparnasse. There were dinner coats and tweeds, low cut gowns and home grown jumpers; but even in that mixed gathering Fisher stood out like a sore thumb. He was dressed in a flannel shirt of black and white checks wide open at the neck, brown corduroy trousers and brown shoes which seemed to be made out of inch thick leather.

Fisher, strange to say, was a poet. Not one of those fawn eyed, lily-in-the-hand star gazers, but a poet of action and red blooded men. His chief sources of inspiration were lumberjacks, rolling mills, sourdoughs and constructional steel workers, which he celebrated in unrhythmical, ungrammatical verse, which nobody read. Critics nobody had ever heard of called his book "Strange Roads" a work of genius.

Without a small independent income of his own he would have been compelled to become a bond salesman or a paying

teller. The last job he would have thought of picking out for himself would have been a dangerous, horny handed one. His own hands were large, thick and white. He had taken a three weeks' trip to Alaska, once; he had visited a lumber camp in the Adirondacks, once; he had hitch hiked from New York to Miami, once, and he had been to Pittsburgh several times. In between these spasms of adventure he lived in Greenwich Village where he had a two room apartment decorated with Pennell etchings and stag antlers he had picked up at an auction sale on the Atlantic City boardwalk.

He had journeyed to France with the avowed intention of ripping hell out of its effete civilization.

"Paris
Corrupt and obs
Cene infanter of
Ten
Thousand
Vices. Bawd whose
ruby incrusted talons have strangled
strong men's
ambitions. O thou—"

He had quickly reached the conclusion that Paris in general, and Montparnasse in particular, was peopled with miserable lapdogs. The nearest they ever came to Nature was the Bois de Boulogne. Not one of them had ever stared death in the face. Nor had he, for that matter; but he did not boast about it.

Montparnasse had accepted him at his face value. The mere fact that his poems were incomprehensible rated him at once among the intelligentsia; and his rough ways, his unusual clothes brought him into the limelight. He met a cosmopolitan crowd of painters, sculptors, authors and poker-work experts; students from Arkansas, Japan, Yonkers and Scandinavia. A few were famous, some were teetering on the verge of fame, the vast majority were trying to make themselves believe they would be famous some day. To them all Fisher preached his gospel of Brute Strength and Brawn.

While the novelty lasted he was lionized. But the novelty soon began to wear thin, and envious little runts were not above saying that Fisher's constant harping on one subject was a bore.

At Mourelle's that night a great many people showed unmistakable signs of acute weariness as soon as he opened his mouth. Several bold spirits had even gone so far as to make rude remarks about "the great blond beast in our midst", and had pointedly inquired when he intended to go back to his lair in the wilds of Central Park.

Sprawling in the depths of an enormous leather chair, he tossed Mourelle's cocktails down his throat as if they had been so much water. They had a sweet, smooth taste, but once they reached their penultimate destination they filled him with a warm glow which spread all the way to his finger tips. He felt more than ever like an embattled giant among pigmies.

LEANING over the arm of his chair, he addressed a knot of men and women gathered around a fat painter with a pointed beard, who was telling them some anecdotes about a coot called Renoir.

"Youse guys—" Fisher broke in amiably—"youse guys give me a pain in the neck. Why don't you—"

Mourelle, his host, intervened hastily. He appeared out of nowhere with another load of cocktails.

"What!" laughed Fisher. "More of that mouth wash? Say, you could pour that pap down my throat all night long and it wouldn't faze me. Why don't you keep a couple of bottles of TNT on hand for your mannish visitors?"

"You poor sap," said Mourelle, gazing at him without enthusiasm, "you're half seas over right now. Swallow a couple more and you'll pass out altogether. We'll heave you out on your ear, hair and all. Go on, Monte, take a couple. I mixed 'em special."

"Down they go," agreed Fisher. "It tastes like cambric tea to me. Say, fellow, you should 'a' been with me the winter we was snowed in up at Weeshahawnee Creek. We made us some white mule—"

"Sure, Monte, I know that one. That's

quite right. Just keep right on talking. I'm not missing a word."

Mourelle faded away behind the piano.

A scowl overcast Fisher's pink and white countenance. Such treatment, it seemed to him, was entirely too offhand. The last brace of cocktails had toned him up. He was primed for a good, brisk argument with somebody.

He arose, squared his shoulders and, staggering slightly, swung across the studio toward a group of cackling nincompoops.

"Let me tell you something," he began. "All this gabble about art ain't going to do you no good. What you need is fresh air and exercise. Lots of it. You, for instance." He threatened a chubby faced Siamese law student with a blunt forefinger. "You look pasty. Sure you do. Get some of that hop out of your lungs. You're too soft. You got to live dangerously if you want to live at all."

"Monte, for the love of Mike—" an onlooker began.

"Yeah! You can talk! You ain't half alive, any of you. The world's too tame nowadays. There's no place in it for bimbos like me. It's over civilized. Danger? You don't know the meaning of the word. Paved streets and lights and a flock of cops. And you're satisfied. Shut in between four walls. Lord! If you ever got out in the open you'd die."

"Nobody's keeping you," some one suggested.

"Where's a guy to go?" he demanded. "He—"

"Have another drink," urged Mourelle, grimly determined to rid the party of its caveman.

"Sure will. Here's to the long trail, the hard trail, with the bitter wind in your mug and a tight belt over an empty belly."

Wails of despair answered him, for his booming voice made all other conversation impossible.

"I know," he snorted, "you don't like it. It gets under your skin. That Heinie who said the world was waiting for a superman was right. I'm sick of being cooped up in this Paris of yours."

"The trains are still running," a girl with long earrings of green jade suggested acidly, "and I'm told the roads are quite good. I don't go out much myself, but you might try."

"And there's lots of water in the Seine," added a long haired fop attired in a dinner coat. "It's quite near here. Try jumping off the Pont Henri IV if you want danger."

"I can swim," objected Fisher, "like a porpoise. When I was up in the Peace River country you had to know how to swim—what I call swimming! Naw, there ain't no danger anywhere in Europe. Poor little Europe all scrubbed and neat, with a pink bow in her hair."

"How about crossing the ocean?" inquired the fat, bearded painter. "I have it on good authority that at this time of year the ships are running half empty. You could—"

"The sea! Great gray mother of us all!" declaimed Fisher. He essayed a nautical roll and had to catch hold of a portière to steady himself.

He gave a snort of derision.

"Ships—I'm sick of 'em too," he asserted. "Glassed in decks—swimming pools—shuffleboard. You don't even know you're at sea. If I could cross on a windjammer I'd go tomorrow. I'd like to see some of youse guys on the schooner I sailed on out of St. John's one time. Say, we was at the pumps for a week. She was shipping 'em green over the bows all the time. Great combers crashing down on the decks. Quartermaster lashed to the wheel, captain lashed to the mast—"

The painter shrugged his shouders.

"I'm afraid he is with us for all time," he sighed. "Never, never, never will he leave Paris. Mourelle, your parties are ruined."

"Just a minute," Mourelle's voice came from the pantry. "I'm mixing a fresh batch of side cars. I'll be right in."

"Dust the glass with rat poison," a lanky individual called out. "That helps sometimes. Prussic acid's good too. Use 'em both and you'll be on the safe side."

"Yeah—laugh, you hyenas!" jeered

Fisher. "Laugh your damn' heads off. You'd curl up and die if you had to do some of the things I've done for the sheer joy of fighting. Danger—"

"There he goes again!" commented a girl with a sharp, white face. "If he likes danger so much why doesn't he do something about it? Isn't there a thing called the Foreign Legion where they go in for that sort of business?"

"Like what, Millie?"

"Oh, danger, you know. Fighting and wars. Somebody was telling me about it. The details escape me. It was rather disgusting, I thought."

The man in the dinner jacket smiled sarcastically.

"I'm afraid that would be a little too strenuous for our boy friend. You're getting down to the raw facts of life when you reach the Foreign Legion. There's nothing theoretical about its toughness. And it doesn't boast about it; it's the genuine article. If Fisher ever got mixed up with that crowd he'd faint."

"Who, me, faint?" ejaculated Fisher. "Man, you're crazy. I'm one hard boiled baby, I tell you."

"Millie is suggesting that you join the Foreign Legion," grinned the painter. "That's the place for you, Tarzan. Deserts, camels, sheiks and danger by the truckload."

FISHER ran one hand through his yellow mane. It occurred to him that it would be a very fine thing to do, to join the Legion. A magnificent gesture of scorn and contempt. He knew all about this famous regiment. It did heroic things in outlandish places.

"L'air est pur,
La route est large,
Le clairon sonne la charge—"

"Oh, my Lord, he's spouting Deroulède," moaned the painter. "This is the end. It's only half past four, but I'm going home."

"Don't go just yet," pleaded Mourelle, reappearing with a tray loaded with glasses. "Don't you hear what Lorring's telling you?" he went on, turning to Fisher. "He's telling you you ought to join the Foreign Legion and live dangerously forever after."

"I hear him," admitted Fisher, thrusting out his jaw, "and I'm almost tempted to enlist. It'd be a change. Living with real men again instead of tame pussy cats. And as for art—"

"That's one thing you need never worry about," Mourelle assured him. "Have one more, Monte. You're in great form tonight."

"I'm just dying to see you in a uniform," snapped the girl with the jade earrings. "You're such a wonderful man!"

"Can't you see Monte charging at the cannon's mouth?" chuckled the man called Lorring. "Go on, Monte, enlist and come back to us covered with medals. All you have to do is to go around to the Bureau Militaire in the Rue St. Dominique and tell 'em you've come to join the Legion. It's as easy as falling off a log. I've read all about it. Sorry I can't join you, old man, but I want to finish Millie's portrait for the *Indépendants*."

"Poor Monte would die of fright," the Tuxedo chimed in. "I think he ought to try for a job as doorman at the Folies Bergères. He could live dangerously opening taxi doors."

Fisher took a fresh grip on the portière. The rod sagged ominously.

"You think you're being funny," he growled. "All right—I'll show you."

"One more," his host insisted. "It's the last of a long line, Monte. You're not afraid of dying an old maid, are you? Go to it."

"I've been to sea and I've been in the backwoods," Fisher summed up, "and I'll be doggoned if I don't blow myself to a hitch in the army. Sure I will! Here's looking at you, Charley!"

He tossed the empty glass into the fireplace where a log was smoldering.

"Where's my hat? Didn't I have a hat? I'm off!"

"Where to, Monte?"

"Ain't I just finished telling you? I'm going to join the Legion and get some clean air in my lungs!"

"Send me a postcard sometime," begged the girl with the earrings. "One with camels and a minaret. You know the sort of thing. I adore minarets."

"You think I'm kidding," Fisher retorted, "but I tell you I'm not. They're a hard bitten crew, are they? Well, I'll give 'em something to talk about! It's going to feel mighty good, believe me, to meet a few of my own breed again. So long, you round shouldered, hollow chested coots! Wish me luck!"

Mourelle patted him on the shoulder.

"You'll feel better in the morning," he laughed. "See you again sometime."

"Goodby, Charley. If you don't hear from me you'll know I'm buried out there in the sand."

"Positively," agreed Mourelle. "Drop around again one of these days and tell us all about it."

The door closed, leaving Fisher alone on the ill lighted staircase.

Sleep might have tempered his enthusiasm, but it was five o'clock in the morning, and instead of going to bed he went for a walk along the banks of the Seine. At nine o'clock, when he reached the red brick building in the Rue St. Dominique, he had not yet shaken off the effects of Mourelle's cocktails, to which he had since added a couple of black coffees plus a dash of rum.

IN THE doorway stood a sad eyed, unshaved soldier in a sloppy blue uniform. As a proof that he was on duty he wore a steel helmet and a pair of black cartridge pouches.

Fisher hailed him like a long lost brother.

"*Bon jour, camarade!*" he exclaimed in his best French. "Here is a recruit for your Legion of foreigners. Where is it that one applies, my old one? In here?"

The soldier jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Third to the right," he grunted, without a shadow of interest. "Knock and enter."

"Do you get many recruits in here?" Fisher went on in the same hearty manner.

"How should I know?" grunted the trooper. "They'll tell you in there. Third to your right. Knock and enter."

Undaunted by this frigid reception, Fisher went down a long, whitewashed corridor until he came to a door to which was affixed a sign reading "*Engagements Volontaires*". He rapped smartly and went in.

"That's right," commented an angry voice. "Knock the confounded specimen of a door down if it interferes with you. What do you think those panes are made of—iron? They're glass. This isn't a stable; close the door! Can't you feel the draft? Close the door!"

The speaker, a sour faced man with a moth eaten mustache, sat at a small desk littered with papers. The room was neither inspiring nor romantic. The walls, painted a dingy yellow, were covered with tattered posters on which generations of flies had left their mark.

For a moment Fisher experienced a feeling of aversion. Did he care enough about Mourelle's friends to go to so much trouble on their account? On the other hand, was he doing this to impress them or because their pernicious society bored him to tears? And anyway it was too late to back out; nor did he want to back out.

"Any openings around here for a bright young man?" he inquired. "How is the Foreign Legion off for recruits these days?"

The sergeant cupped his hand around his right ear and screwed his face up into a knot.

"*Hein?* What's the matter? Can't you speak French? What do you want? Not drunk, are you?"

His manner was not friendly. He was as crabbed and cranky as only a French government employee can be when he really tries.

"But certainly I speak French," said Fisher. "I desire to know whether you are in need of recruits for the Foreign Legion."

"You do, do you? Don't worry about

what the Legion needs. What do *you* want?"

Fisher boiled his request down to its simplest expression.

"I want to join the Legion," he explained, speaking slowly and clearly.

"So that's it, is it?" grumbled the sergeant, as if such a request had never been made in that office. He twisted his head sidewise and stared at Fisher out of the corner of his eye. "You know what you're letting yourself in for, do you? You don't want to get in, and then start howling because you can't get out. That's not the type of recruit we want. We need men."

A rich glow mantled Fisher's cheeks.

"What do I look like to you?" he demanded. "A girl of sixteen?"

"You never can tell." The sergeant shrugged. "They come in here, big fellows like you, and the first thing we hear they've cracked up and gone to pieces. The Legion's no bed of roses. It's a hard life, unless you're used to roughing it. Better go away and think it over for a day or so."

"I will not!" hotly retorted Fisher. "It's now or not at all. I'm not the sort of bird who changes his mind every minute or so."

The sergeant jerked a printed form out of a pigeonhole and smacked it down on his blotter.

"*C'est bon!*" he rasped. "Don't shout at me like that or I'll have you thrown out of here. Name of God, just remember who you're speaking to, will you? What's your name—age—nationality—occupation?"

Fisher answered these questions truthfully, for he was thinking of future press notices:

FAMOUS POET
JOINS FRENCH
FOREIGN LEGION

When, however, he called himself a poet, the sergeant flung down his pen and folded his arms.

"Don't try to make a monkey out of me!" he shouted. "A poet! A poet! Sacred name of a thousand thunders! You look more like a stevedore to me. If you've got to lie, let's have an intelligent one."

"I said poet and I mean poet," retorted Fisher. "I'm not ashamed of my vocation, monsieur. Indeed, I am proud of it! I maintain—"

He was interrupted by the appearance of a corpulent, middle aged captain, rather bald, with spectacles perched midway down his nose.

"*Eh bien!*" he ejaculated. "What is going on in here, Cromier? One does not hear oneself with all this shouting. I demand to know what is going on. Is this man crazy?"

"Judge for yourself, my Captain," exclaimed the sergeant. "This individual desires to join the Legion."

"Well, and why not? Very laudable ambition. Looks sound enough to me."

"But a poet! He declares himself to be a poet."

This completely took the wind out of the officer's sails. He walked up to within three feet of Fisher and gazed at him over the rims of his glasses.

"What have you to say for yourself?" he inquired sharply. "You write poetry? You do nothing else?"

"Nothing," Fisher declared. "Not another thing!"

The officer did not reach to his shoulder. Nor did the sergeant. He was faintly amused by the antics of these puny creatures who called themselves soldiers. He craved to meet a few honest, hard hitting, hard fisted Legionnaires.

"You haven't made some mistake?" insisted the officer. "You understand the consequences your enlistment will entail? Twenty-five centimes a day, discipline, no shouting at sergeants, manual labor, privations? You understand all that?"

"Yes, indeed I do," smiled Fisher. "It's all perfectly clear."

The officer removed his glasses and tapped them on the lapel of Fisher's mackinaw.

"My boy, you're as clean limbed, upstanding a recruit as I've seen in many a day. I don't mind your being a poet, not

in the least, but for your own sake we're going to call you something else. Let's say we enter you as an unskilled laborer. How's that? It's for your own good. Little things like that sometimes wreck a man's career in the army. You don't want to be laughed at, and Legionnaires are full of fun. Ha-ha! Full of fun, if you know what I mean. They might make jokes at your expense."

"No," said Fisher, sticking manfully to his guns. "I'm sorry, but I don't want to make any change whatsoever—" he was still thinking of the press notices—"and I can take care of myself when the joking starts."

The officer pursed his lips and raised one eyebrow.

"*Très bien, mon ami.* You are free to please yourself. I wish you much success." Turning to the sergeant, he snapped, "*Expedite!*" and hurried back into his private office.

"You're asking for it," commented the sergeant. "It's none of my business. Follow me," he added, pushing back his chair. "Medical inspection comes next, and then you'll be all through."

HE LED FISHER into an adjoining room with a slippery red tiled floor and whitewashed windows. It was cold, bare and gray.

On a bench by the wall Fisher was surprised to see a heavily built, bull necked man with a close cropped bullet head, red ears and a wide, loose lipped mouth. The startling thing about him, however, was not his massive and ugly face; he was stark naked. A ship in full sail was tattooed on his chest; on his right forearm there was a heart pierced by an arrow. His feet were not very clean.

A slow smile distended his mouth when he caught sight of Fisher.

"Hustle out of your rags," ordered the sergeant. "You don't want to keep the doctor waiting. He'll be along in a minute. If you're not ready you'll catch hell."

The door slammed.

The smile on the naked man's face expanded from ear to ear. He scratched his thighs with broken finger nails, and after prolonged heavings he emitted a gurgling chuckle.

"A boet!" he exclaimed, adding one short, corrosive word which left no doubt as to the intensity of his emotions.

"That's right," agreed Fisher, "but don't let that come between us, my old one. A poet I was; today I shed my identity and become a Legionnaire. How about you—you're headed for the Legion too, I suppose?"

Somehow, his bluff, hearty manner did not ring quite true. Instead of accepting Fisher as a fellow roughneck, the man acted like a halfwit. He opened his big mouth and laughed inanely.

"What's the big idea?" inquired Fisher, tossing his mackinaw into a corner and loosening the buttons of his shirt.

The man, whose name was Otto Kurtz—the Bremen police wanted him for robbery—waggled his bullet head.

"A boet!" he repeated. "*Du lieber Gott!*"

He clapped one hand to his mouth and gazed, round eyed, at the freak. His face became congested and purple. Unable to stand the strain, he broke down altogether, snorting, laughing, crying, stamping his feet and pounding his knees.

In between spasms he gasped:

"Mary hat a leedle lamb, *ach du lieber Gott*, ids vleece vos vite as shnow."

"Say, listen, fellow," Fisher broke in. "Speak English, do you? All right! Fine! Get this straight. Either you quit or I'm going to bust you one on the jaw."

This threat made no impression upon the German, whose mind was one of those primitive, single track affairs which can deal with not more than one idea at a time. He meant no harm, but to him a poet was an incomprehensible, ridiculous creature; therefore he laughed even though Fisher stood over him with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

"English?" he gurgled. "*Ja wohl.* I am on a British ship sometime. A boet! Through the door I have heard. Mary hat a leedle lamb—You wride boetry, so?"

The situation, Fisher decided, was intolerable. He felt called upon to do something, but he was not quite sure as to the course he ought to follow. The stupid fool deserved a thrashing; on the other hand the military authorities might make a fuss if one of their recruits were knocked out in the medical inspection room.

He temporized by thrusting his fist against the man's nose and jamming his head back against the wall.

"Yeah, I'm a poet," he snarled, "and this is what I write with. See it? Feel it? Now shut up or I'll flatten you out."

This was a tactical error, for the German had no scruples whatsoever. He brushed Fisher's hand aside and struck him a tremendous blow in the pit of the stomach.

Never had Fisher been hit so hard. His legs shot out from under him and he sat down, skidding across the tiled floor.

Before he could recover his breath the door was thrown open.

"Doctor, 'tention!" barked the sergeant.

Kurtz sprang to his feet and stood motionless, chin up, chest out, hands down, toes turned out. He had served three years with the Jaegers and knew what was expected of him.

Too dazed to move, Fisher gaped at the doctor, a gray bearded man in a long white coat, who came bustling into the room as if he had a train to catch.

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, drawing in his chin. "On the floor. Fits? Epileptic fits? Don't want recruits suffering from epilepsy. Won't do. Can't have 'em. Don't want 'em."

The crucial moment in Fisher's life had arrived. All he had to do was to admit that he suffered from fits and they would let him go. But there was a streak of stubbornness in his nature which kept him from backing out.

Unable to speak, he made signs with his hands while he opened and closed his mouth like a stranded carp.

"It is the poet," the sergeant apologized.

"Indeed? The poet? Yes, to be sure. Extraordinary people these Americans. They do strange things. There's a man called Whitman—"

" 'Leaves of Grass,' " wheezed Fisher. "Never had a fit, I swear it. It's that—" He checked himself. "I mean, I stumbled."

"Stumbled? Astonishing! How? On what?"

"Unlacing my shoes," Fisher lied. "I slipped. Caught myself on the edge of the bench."

His grudge against the German was a personal matter which he meant to settle in his own way without outside interference.

The doctor looked at Kurtz, then back again at Fisher. He did not believe a word Fisher said, but he was wise enough to mind his own business.

"*Bon*," he snapped. "It's plausible. All right, my man, off with your clothes. I'll have a look at you."

The examination of the candidates was brief and none too thorough. Kurtz was passed in two minutes flat. Fisher was detained a little longer, chiefly because the doctor wanted to air his views about Walt Whitman.

"What's this?" he inquired, pressing his finger tips against a patch of discolored skin beneath Fisher's ribs. "Where you fell? A strange bruise. I am almost tempted to believe—no, I'm not, either. I never meddle. You're built like a horse, my boy. Splendid! Whitman's your greatest genius; bear that in mind always. Goodby."

He trotted away and the sergeant took charge again. He stood by, fussy as a hen, while the two recruits were dressing, then he hustled them out into the office and thrust their papers at them.

"Sign!" he ordered. "Come on. Hurry up. You can glare at one another some other time. Right!" He smacked a blotter down on the wet signatures. "There's a draft on its way through from Lille. You can join it at the PLM station. Train leaves at 19:43. Tickets, subsistence allowance—all correct."

In a breathless hurry he handed them over to a *gendarme*, a pompous man in a

dark blue uniform, the embodiment of the power and might of the military system. He gave the recruits just one look, and for the first time Fisher realized that the painter was really cut, and that for him there was no turning back.

"My Lord, I am in a sweet mess!" he thought, sweating with fear. "Suffering cats, what made me do it?"

"Squad!" bayed the *gendarme.* " 'Shun! By your left, quick march!"

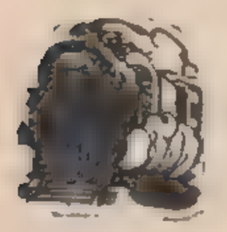
Fisher staggered out into the warm sunshine. It was spring, Paris was at its best, and as he clumped heavy footed through the streets it seemed to Fisher that at every step he was leaving life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Because he was a soldier, instead of walking on the sidewalk he was made to march in "military formation" in the gutter, elbow to elbow with the detestable Kurtz. The latter looked straight to his front, but out of the corner of his mouth, he whispered:

"Rub my nose, vould you? You beeg, soft slob! *Dumkopf!*"

"You'll get yours, don't worry," Fisher assured him. "When I—"

"No talking in the ranks!" barked the *gendarme.* "This isn't a circus parade. March at attention!"

So they went through Paris, grazed by hurtling taxis, followed by small boys, sneered at by respectable folk who mistook them for a brace of criminals on their way to jail.



EVENTUALLY they reached the station and were shoved into a third class compartment already packed stiff with recruits. Ten seconds in their company cured Fisher of his illusions about Legionnaires. He had expected them to be cynical, tight mouthed men, swashbucklers and soldiers of fortune, rough diamonds with hearts of gold, as it were. Instead he found himself pitchforked in among a crew of gluttonous, godless swine; pasty faced, shifty eyed, snarling blackguards from the slums of Brussels and Köln and Warsaw.

They greeted the two newcomers with howls of anger; nevertheless they squeezed up and made room for them to sit down on the wooden seat. In all probability they would have accepted Fisher as a fellow scoundrel if Kurtz, the moment the *gendarme's* back was turned, had not launched into a vehement account of the morning's events.

He spoke in German, a language Fisher did not understand, but his meaning was unmistakable.

Before long every man in the compartment was leering at Fisher, and Kurtz, encouraged by their guffaws, suddenly passed from words to deeds.

He leaned forward, caught hold of Fisher's coat collar and shook him violently.

"I fix you," he declared. "I fix you good. Boet! Rub my nose mit your fist, vould you? I show you!"

Fisher saw red. His fist crashed against the side of Kurtz's jaw. It was such a smashing punch that for a second or so he feared it might have disastrous consequences. After all, he did not want to kill the man.

His anxiety was quickly allayed. Kurtz, who had swayed sidewise with the blow, bounced up like a cork and sailed into his opponent with his fists, his head and his knees.

It was not a fight in any sense of the word; it was a high class lynching bee. The entire German contingent pitched into the fray for the honor of the Fatherland. One man caught him by the hair on his head and jerked him backward so that Kurtz might butt him in the stomach. Some one else struck him over the ear with a bottle. His right eye closed; his nose was squashed out flat; blood squirted over his cheeks. He fell to the floor and they jumped on him.

While he lay inert in the narrow alleyway they tore the coat off his back, stripped him of his money and flung his papers out of the window. They had a grand time. None of them, with the possible exception of Kurtz, wanted to do him any serious injury. They despised him because he was a poet, because he was

large, full fed and clean. But they had no deep seated grudge against him. Now that they had thrashed and despoiled him, thus establishing their own superiority, they were ready to admit him into the brotherhood.

Unfortunately, he was incapable of any such philosophical detachment. He was scared green, so scared that he was goaded into taking desperate steps to escape his tormentors.

For a long while he lay motionless, listening to the sound of their maudlin voices, until a boot prodded his ribs and somebody said:

"It's not as bad as all that. Come on, my old one. Wake up! A little red wine will do you good."

As an added proof of the kindliness of his motives the speaker poured a thread of wine on to Fisher's head. The other recruits greeted this move with subdued chuckles. Their high spirits were beginning to die down. Several of them were asleep and snoring.

Mustering all his strength, Fisher clambered to his feet. Before anybody could stop him he wrenched the door open and swung himself down on to the running board.

A warm wind swept past his face. By the tracks there were fields of clover where cows grazed. In the distance a red roofed village clustered around a slender church spire. It looked peaceful and quiet and settled.

Fisher's original intention had been to drop off the train and be done with the whole sickening business, but the train was rocking along at top speed and he had sense enough to realize that a fall on to the ballast could do him no good.

Above him the doorway was jammed with startled, grinning faces. A long arm shot out and tried to grab at his hair. He ducked out of reach and edged down the running board.

A minute later two elderly ladies were horrified to see the privacy of their first class "*Dames seules*" compartment invaded by a blood smeared, villainous ruffian whose very shirt hung in rags.

Fisher was just as perturbed as they were. From the outside the carriage had looked empty. The situation was somewhat embarrassing, particularly so since the two ladies would not listen to reason. Cowering in their corners, they screamed and shrieked, fending him off with the palms of their outstretched hands. One of them, her hat fallen down over her eyes, flung a hand bag at his feet.

"Take it!" she shrilled. "Take it and go away! Oh, go away!"

The bag opened. Notes and coins and a powder puff spilled out. To safeguard the money Fisher drew the door shut, which merely added to the ladies' unspeakable terror. To soothe them he placed a finger to his lips and said, "Sssh!" And when they saw this vile monster of a man purse his lips and say "Ssh!", they knew their last day on earth had come.

With one accord they leaped at the alarm cord, scrambled for it and finally dragged it down with the combined weight of both their quivering bodies.

Brakes ground. Fisher was flung headforemost against the padded back of a seat. The train lurched, reeled, gave a series of tremendous jolts and stopped. For an instant there was silence; then pandemonium broke loose. The ladies yelled; guards came running down the track; the windows were packed with anxious people who shouted innumerable questions and received no answer.

And in the midst of it all stood Fisher, protesting feebly:

"But, mesdames, I assure you, appearances are deceptive. I am not a thief. Permit me to explain—"

He explained nothing. The ladies did all the talking. Rough hands caught hold of Fisher. He was cracked over the back of the neck with a spanner.

"It is a dirty foreigner who has tried to attack two women in a first class carriage." The news sped from engine to baggage van and, as the train crew carted the criminal down the line, shouts of "Kill him!" filled the sunlit air.

It was a bad beginning, but he was only at the very foot of his Calvary. He was

a marked man, a desperate, dangerous character.

For the next eighteen hours he was locked up in a recess in the baggage van; at Marseilles a *gendarme* snapped a pair of bracelets on his wrists and whisked him across town to Fort St. Jean, the sorting station for outward bound colonial troops.

Of the fort he saw nothing except a cell in the bowels of the earth, where he was kept in solitary confinement for a week. It was a foul hole. The black walls sweated moisture; rats shared his sloppy food; day by day he grew filthier, lousier, more despondent.

Face to face at last with brutal reality, stripped of all sham, he was forced to admit that he was not the hard guy he had pretended to be. He liked clean underwear and hot baths, good food and pleasant people, comfort and security. His spirits sank to zero at the prospect of having to spend the next five years in the company of men like Kurtz.

At the end of the week he was marched out of his cell into a room full of typewriters, uniformed clerks, files and noise. At the far end of this room an officer sat astride a chair with his arms folded across the back. He had a bony, flat cheeked face with a scrubby black mustache and a monocle in his right eye.

"The prisoner," announced Fisher's escort in a loud clear voice which brought all the typewriters to a standstill.

"He's not very appetizing," commented the officer. "And how do you like our cells?" he went on, bringing his monocle to bear upon Fisher. "Find 'em hygienic and restful?"

"They're hell," Fisher confessed humbly.

"We strive to please. However, that's beside the point. Now, my lad, I want to slide a few words of fatherly advice into your ear. Judging by your brief but colorful record, this advice will probably be wasted, but that's none of my concern. You realize, I take it, that you have been guilty of a whole string of abominable crimes, both military and civil."

He spoke in a hard dry voice, which bit like acid into Fisher's brain.

"What I want you to bear in mind is this: if you were not a recruit with only one day's service to your discredit you would undoubtedly be court-martialed, found guilty and sentenced anywhere from ten to twenty years' hard labor. But you are a recruit and the commandant thinks a week's solitary confinement is punishment enough for the present. Let it serve as a warning. You think that cell was hell. It's nothing to what you'd find if you were sent to a penal battalion. And this is the point I want you to remember. The army has a long memory. You are being let off very gently this time, but if you make one more break, then heaven help you! One look at your record will convince your judges that the army is no place for you. Twenty years hard labor, I should say, would be the minimum they'd hand you. If you're at all amenable to sweet reason you'll stick like a leech to the straight and narrow path of duty."

Fisher did not attempt to argue with the officer, nor did he try to point out that he had not had the slightest intention of molesting those confounded women. He accepted the suspended sentence without a murmur of protest. He was licked.

CORPORAL KURTZ spoke in a low undertone.

"What's wrong, Fisher? Can't sleep?"

"Nope."

"Worried, eh? It comes today, maybe. Maybe not at all. Nobody knows. Have a cigaret?"

Fisher peered through the shadows at the pale, whitish blob of Kurtz's face.

"I could do with a smoke," he confessed. "Got one to spare?"

"Sure. No good leaving my cigarets for the Riffi."

He struck a match. Its small flame threw highlights on their sweat streaked, grimy faces.

"A funny thing," Kurtz went on after a pause. "Three months ago we was in the train from Paris. It is not long, three

months. And now we come into action maybe."

Fisher exhaled a lungful of smoke. His hand shook as he carried the cigaret to his mouth.

"It feels more like ten years to me. Ten years or ten minutes. It's gone quick, all right! Last April. Say, do you really think—"

His voice strangled in his throat.

"The Riffi?" Kurtz shrugged his shoulders. "When they come they come. Perhaps we are relieved before they get here. Who knows? The lieutenant, he knows nothing. Nobody does."

"It's the damned uncertainty gets on my nerves," Fisher complained. "Sitting around, waiting, listening to the silence. That's what keeps me awake."

"A goot soldier, he has no nerves," chuckled Kurtz. "You ain't a goot soldier yet, Fisher, but you have improved. Remember when you rubbed my nose mit your fist? Helpless you was and foolish. But you ain't so bad. You're learning."

"I'll say! It's that, or twenty years with the penal battalion. I'd learn Sanskrit if it'd do any good."

"Sanskrit ain't no good in the army. It is better to learn to shoot straight. Maybe you need it today—straight shooting."

"Yep, it's like waiting for a storm to break. You can feel it in the air. A sort of breathlessness."

He lapsed into silence. Every muscle and sinew in his body ached, but his brain was wide awake. The events of the past three months unfolded before his eyes: the sunlit deck of the transport steaming toward Africa; Oran rising white and glistening out of the sea; the yellow, many windowed walls of the barracks at Sidi-bel-Abbes. He remembered vividly the howls of delight which had greeted him when the regimental barber clipped away his lion-like mane. During the first few days he had suffered a great deal, and then gradually the routine life had blunted his senses — drills, inspections, route marches, more drills. He had worked like a galley slave and slept like a log.

His *bête noire*, Kurtz, had been promoted to the corporals' training squad and had ceased to pester him. Without being aware of it he himself was slowly being molded to the Legion's pattern when the explosion in the Riff hills had thrown the depot into a turmoil.

Abd-el-Krim's warriors had smashed in the line of outposts; native troops had gone over to the insurgents; Taza and Fez were threatened; France's hold on Morocco hung by a thread. There were not enough seasoned troops to stop the gap. Half trained units were rushed into the threatened area.

The section to which Fisher belonged had detrained in the middle of the night and had gone into the hills by forced marches to block the Tabarka valley. Fifty men—a handful of pebbles thrown in the path of a torrent.

Stripped to the waist and sweating, they had built a blockhouse on a knoll rising sharply above the floor of the valley. Their orders were to hold on until relieved.

Fisher cleared his throat.

"How long d'you think we can hold out?" he inquired. "Long enough for the Rodellier column to get here? I heard the lieutenant say—"

Kurtz rubbed the back of his hand against his chin.

"How long?" he repeated. "You can't tell. This section, it needs more discipline. It ain't solid. Men like you—civilians—they think too much. Maybe we last a day, maybe two or three. I don't know. It all depends."

The light was growing stronger, and a thin, cold wind set the dust swirling inside the four walls of the blockhouse. One man stirred, then another. Yawning, the section cook shuffled over to his battery of fire blackened pots.

"*Debout là-dedans!*" ordered the orderly sergeant. "Turn out!"

Davron, the lieutenant, his hands in his pockets, shook himself like a wet dog and climbed up beside the sentry.

"See anything suspicious, Kumbach?"

"The light is poor, *mon Lieutenant.* It looks all clear to me, but it's hard to tell."

"Water carrying party, this way!" the

orderly sergeant called out. "On the double! Kurtz, you're in charge."

Fisher caught up the water bottles belonging to the men of his platoon, slung them over his shoulder and trotted toward the group forming up in front of the sergeant.

THE NIGHT was over, the spell broken. The matter-of-fact voice of the sergeant made him forget his fears. Once again he was a cog in the machine.

"All present," Kurtz announced.

The sergeant marched over and saluted the lieutenant's back.

"Water carrying party ready to move off," he announced.

Lieutenant Davron raised his binoculars to his eyes and took one last look at the boulder strewn valley. A hundred yards away a thread of water glinted in the morning sunlight.

"I suppose it's all right," he said dubiously, "although I'm not quite sure. I thought I saw something move— The light's bad. Still—" he lowered his glasses —"we might as well get it over. Post a squad to cover the party in case anything should happen."

A dozen men trudged over to the parapet. Breech bolts rattled sharply, then silence.

"*Bien*," snapped Davron. "All right, let 'em go."

Fisher scrambled over the wall. The last shadows had vanished and the valley was flooded with a hard white light. The troopers, their water bottles jangling, lumbered down the steep declivity leading to the bank of the stream.

Then it came—a rending crash which echoed and reechoed between the walls of rock. Fisher saw the man ahead of him lurch drunkenly and pitch forward on to his face. He slithered down the hillside and curled up limp and motionless at the base of a round gray boulder. Two other Legionnaires were down; a third, both hands clasped to the pit of his stomach, his eyes starting out of his head, ran straight into Fisher, knocked him down and died sprawling on top of him.

Fisher pushed the body aside and scrambled to his feet. Something whistled shrilly past his ear. His *képi* was wrenched off his head and tossed yards away.

"Lord!" he thought, "I'm going to be killed. Oh, my God, this is awful!"

Kurtz's red, furious face loomed up before him. Above the uproar he heard the corporal shout:

"Get down and fill those bottles! Who gave you orders to stop?"

He was tempted to run in the opposite direction, but Kurtz caught him by the elbow and gave him a shove. He stumbled downhill, going faster and faster until he was traveling at breakneck speed. Bullets clacked about him, chipping fragments off the rocks.

Fisher had to crawl upstream to find clear water. He slung his cans into a sandy pool between two flat stones. The things floated like corks. He had to force them under one by one and hold them beneath the surface while the air gurgled out.

An explosion, louder than the others, made him look up. Kurtz, kneeling on the bank above him, was firing as fast as he could squeeze the trigger.

"Finished?" he called down as he paused to reload. "Take Filache's bottles. Some of them may be full. He's dead, ain't he?"

Filache was very dead. The front of his skull had been mashed to pulp. One look was too much for Fisher. Festooned with wet canteens, he crawled hastily out of the gully.

"They're closing in on the left," Kurtz warned him. "Don't bother about them. Machine gun is in action. That'll stop 'em."

Side by side they scrambled up the slope. Out of the tail end of his eye Fisher caught sight of gray shapes moving about among the boulders. The blockhouse towered high above him, miles away. He lumbered on, his lungs bursting, hampered by the water bottles which flopped against his sides and coiled around his arms. Suddenly he heard Kurtz grunt as though poleaxed, and saw him go down on hands and knees. A dark stain welled

up through the cloth of his tunic. His right arm crumpled up, he pitched over on to his side.

Fisher stared wildly in the direction of the natives. Some had worked their way past him and were swinging inward to cut him off. A streak of sunlight rippled on polished steel—a tongue of flame leaped straight at him and a slug missed him by inches.

He had a swift vision of a brown, bony face crisped with hate. A crazy, snarling madness seized hold of him. He leaped at the Moroccan, came down in a heap on top of him and, in the end, killed him. It was a messy, amateurish job. Instead of using his bayonet he gripped the man by the ears and banged his head on the stones —banged and banged and banged till the stones dripped red.

Then he remembered the sleet of bullets which was beating about him, and his eye fell on Kurtz who was wriggling along on his belly, clawing at the ground.

"I can't carry him!" Fisher choked. "He's a ton weight!"

Nevertheless he did. He hoisted the corporal to his feet and half dragged, half carried him up to the blockhouse.

If at the back of his mind he harbored the notion that he had done something rather fine he was quickly undeceived. The first man with whom he had any dealings was his platoon sergeant, a flat nosed, beady eyed Russian built like the side of a house.

"Specimen of putrescent tripe!" said the Russian. "The whole section has been wasting ammunition to cover you. We don't want heroes in this section. We want soldiers who'll do what they're told to do."

"But the corporal—" wheezed Fisher.

"Who mentioned the corporal? I'm talking about you. Loitering! Strolling about like a gentleman of leisure. Stopping for a little fight with a Riffi."

"A little fight!" protested Fisher with the blood of his victim still hot on his cheeks. "Why, that man—"

"You're supposed to be a Legionnaire, not an assassin!" retorted the sergeant. "What do you think the government gave you a bayonet for—to pick your teeth? Don't start making trouble, my lad, or I'll have you under arrest so quick you won't have time to wink. Give me those bottles—I'll hand 'em round. Rejoin your platoon, on the double!"

The mere mention of arrest had a dynamic effect upon Fisher. He sprang up to attention, saluted, about turned by numbers—and found himself face to face with Lieutenant Davron.

The officer looked mildly amused.

"Where's your *képi?*" he inquired.

"The Lord alone knows!" were the words on the tip of Fisher's tongue, but he realized that such an answer would be prejudicial to good order and military discipline.

"I—I must have mislaid it, *mon Lieutenant,*" he apologized. "I think it's outside. Shall I go fetch it?"

He would have walked downhill on his hands had he been ordered to do so. Not that he had the slightest desire to leave the shelter of those stout stone walls, but anything was preferable to the prospect of a lifetime with the penal battalion.

"No," Davron said judiciously. "I think not—not just now. The sun is going to be dangerous in another half-hour. Better find another *képi.* There's one over yonder." He nodded in the direction of a broken, huddled shape above which hovered a cloud of flies. "Shove it on."

The cap was still damp with the sweat of its owner. Fisher put it on gingerly. It felt like a dead and clammy hand pressing down upon his forehead. He was not superstitious, but a cold chill ran down his spine.

"That's done it," he said to himself. "I'm a marked man. I'll get mine as sure as the Lord made little apples!" And his knees shook.

Davron and the sergeant were staring at him in a most disquieting fashion. He saluted once more and was about to hurry away when the lieutenant beckoned to him.

"I knew it!" he muttered beneath his breath. "What's wrong now, I wonder. This is hell. The cap's too small."

He halted three paces from the officer and stood like a ramrod.

"*Mon garçon,*" Davron said in a friendly, confidential tone, "I am almost tempted to believe you would go out and fetch that cap if I gave you permission to do so."

Fisher's heart sank into the cold, empty pit of his stomach and stayed there.

"Yes, *mon Lieutenant,*" he agreed, his lips stiff with fright.

"You see?" grinned Davron, turning to the sergeant. "What did I tell you?"

"He's too wild," objected the non-com. "A hothead, that's what he is, *mon Lieutenant.* And he's been in the army not quite three months."

"Of course he's wild," agreed Davron. "On the other hand, look at his record: not a single entry against him since he reached the depot. That's the sort of wild man I like. Discipline plus initiative, there's nothing like it."

He tapped Fisher on the shoulder and Fisher almost collapsed, but no one noticed the elasticity of his knee joints.

"What's it all about?" he wondered. "I knew darn' well I was in Dutch. Leave it to me to get all the tough breaks."

"Fisher," the lieutenant was saying, "you're an American, I believe, and of course you know how to ride?"

Fisher's *haute école* dated back to the days of his extreme youth when he had ridden spavined bread-cart horses on the beach at Atlantic City.

"Yes, *mon Lieutenant,*" he admitted, "I can ride."

"I knew it. All Americans know how to ride, don't they? Now, my boy, I have a suggestion to make. There are some very ugly entries on your conduct sheet which are bound to hamper your career and, personally, I'd like to see them wiped off the record. I need—"

LEAVING his sentence hanging in midair, and Fisher rooted to the ground, he hurried over to the wall and studied the landscape through his glasses. The firing had died away to a sporadic crackle. Inside the blockhouse there was neither commotion nor excitement. A non-com was distributing cartridges which the troopers laid out in front of them in neat, shiny rows. The cook squatted over his fire brewing coffee in a large cannister. Close beside him lay Kurtz, propped up against a pile of knapsacks. His wounded shoulder had been dressed by a stretcher bearer, and in his left hand he held a mug full of steaming coffee.

"You're lucky," growled the sergeant as soon as the lieutenant's back was turned. "It's not every officer who'd give you such a chance! Still, I won't say you don't deserve the chance. I've seen worse recruits in my time."

"Is he g-going to wipe out the charges!" stammered Fisher, unable to believe his ears. "Do you really think—"

The lieutenant intervened.

"It's as I thought," he said briskly. "We're not surrounded yet. Fisher, I want you to take my horse and do your best to reach Colonel Rodellier's column. You are not compelled to go. This is a job for a volunteer. Even if you do not go those charges will eventually be forgotten. But I think you're just the man for the job. What is it to be—yes or no?"

"Not on your life!" yelled Fisher. "I'll be damned if I'll leave the fort. Get somebody else to do your dirty work!"

But his yell was quite inaudible. It did not pass his lips. He had been yessing people for so many weeks that, put to the test, much against his better judgment, the one thing he could say was:

"Yes, *mon Lieutenant.* I'll be glad to go."

Perspiration which had been accumulating inside the leather lining of his *képi* poured in an icy stream behind his ears and down his neck. He shuddered miserably.

"I knew it," he told himself. "It was bound to happen. It's this cap."

In a dream he heard Davron saying:

"Snatch a cup of coffee while I'm finishing the message. Tell the colonel we're being attacked by at least two thousand rebels. He thought the main drive would

come farther to the east. We ought to be able to hold out at least four days. That'll give him time to get here."

Still in a dream, Fisher walked over and said goodby to Kurtz while he scalded his throat with black, unsweetened coffee.

The corporal was turning blue about the lips, and there was an ominous rattle gathering in his throat; nevertheless Fisher envied him.

"*Bonne chance*," labored Kurtz. "Tell 'em to hurry. Don't forget. The bullet, it's in my lung. Can't breathe—"

In his eyes there was a strained, worried look which made Fisher wince.

"Leave it to me," he urged. "You'll be between clean sheets in a few days."

"And I'll be under the sod," he added mentally. "I wish to God *I* had a hole in my lung!"

They shook hands. He shook hands with the sergeant and the lieutenant. He felt like a condemned man whose last hour has struck.

The horse, a seventeen-hand roan stallion, was led forward. As soon as it saw Fisher it laid back its ears and pawed the ground. It looked as high as a mountain, more dangerous than a whole flock of tribesmen.

"That's a valuable horse," Fisher hazarded. "Perhaps it would be better if I went on foot. I might be able to slip through—"

"Nonsense!" snapped Davron. "Don't bother about the horse. There is more than the life of a horse at stake. Here, you'll need a weapon—" he handed Fisher his revolver. "Slip this into your pocket. We'll keep 'em busy while you're getting under way. All set? Goodby and good luck!"

Again he shook the brave volunteer's limp hand.

The brave volunteer, assisted from behind by his platoon sergeant, clambered into the saddle. The broad toes of his boots would not pass through the stirrup irons, which had not been designed for the feet of private soldiers, and he was compelled to slide his boots in sidewise. Then he pulled down his chin strap and grasped the reins. There were more reins than he knew what to do with—reins for the snaffle, reins for the bit, reins for the curb.

From the dizzy heights of the roan's back he could see over the rim of the wall into the valley, where small groups of men were edging slowly from cover to cover, closing in around the blockhouse. They saw him, too, and greeted his appearance with a ragged volley. The bullets sang by high overhead, and the roan showed unmistakable signs of restiveness.

"Whoa!" protested Fisher. "Whoa, laddy boy! Gently now!"

"I thought you said you knew how to ride," commented the sergeant, staring suspiciously at Fisher's feet.

Fisher, by that time, had given himself up for lost and had resigned his soul to whatever gods might take a kindly interest in Legionnaires. He was so far gone that he no longer feared even his platoon sergeant.

"Do I know how to ride!" he cried. "But of course, my sergeant. It is the cowboy style that I have. Thus does one ride the untamed horses of the Western plains. In my youth—"

The harsh clatter of the machine guns drowned him out. The whole section joined in, firing salvo upon crashing salvo. The sergeant, tight lipped and more than a little dubious, led the prancing horse toward the break in the wall. Fisher gave one last look at the blockhouse with its stout stone wall, at his mates, at the cook, at Kurtz whose head had fallen forward on to his chest.

Lieutenant Davron waved his hand. The sergeant stepped back and gave the horse a treacherous whack on the haunches with the flat of his hand.

"Hey!" protested Fisher.

HE SAID no more, for the roan shot away like greased lightning, clicking, clattering, stumbling down the rock strewn slope. Fisher bounced high in the air, keeled over, caught himself, bounced again and fell forward on to the horse's neck, which he clasped in both arms.

On sped the roan. Fisher closed his eyes and waited for the crash. It was a long time in coming. They reached level ground and pelted hell bent for leather across the hard, sunbaked earth. All at once he heard the thunder of other hoofs and a chorus of angry shouts. A shadow swept up beside him. Twisting his head sidewise, he beheld a bearded, swarthy man in a white burnous, who rode like a centaur. On the other flank another Arab loomed up. Others were closing in behind.

The swarthy man caught hold of the roan's bridle and checked its headlong flight.

It dawned on Fisher that he was about to be taken prisoner. His captors had no fear of him. They were laughing in a sneering, unpleasant manner, and the native in the white burnous not only laughed but spat in his face. Simultaneously he was clouted in the small of the back and a hand groped for a purchase on the nape of his neck.

A gust of anger, hot and glowing, swept over him. To be brought down in action was bad enough, but to be sneered at and spat upon and handled like a meal sack was ten thousand times worse.

He forced himself upright, yanked the lieutenant's revolver from his pocket, jammed it in the native's face and fired point blank.

"That'll hold you for awhile!" he yelled.

He slewed around and let drive at the man on the near side. He missed the man but hit the horse between the eyes. Two of 'em! The roan leaped forward like an arrow.

A string of shots rang out. A streak of fire ran through his thigh. He tried to fire over his shoulder, but the gun was jarred out of his hand, and again he was hit. A slug smashed into his left wrist, and the force of the blow almost tore his arm from its socket.

As he rocked and bounced in the saddle, clinging with his right hand to the pommel, he caught a blurred glimpse of his pursuers. They were no longer charging in a compact mass but were scattering right and left across the floor of the valley. They were no longer following him at all, for the machine guns up in the blockhouse were hosing them down with lead.

It was his last clear thought. He slumped down, burying his face against the roan's mane.

He lost count of time. The land streaked by beneath the flying hoofs, white sand alternating with stretches of glittering gray rock. The rattle of musketry dwindled to an echo, and the echo itself receded and died away. The pain in his left arm spread through him in fiery waves which seared his brain.

The stallion slowed down to a canter, from a canter to a walk. When it stopped he roused himself long enough to urge it on, and the effort exhausted him. He was consumed with thirst but he was too weak to reach for his canteen. The high white sun of noon beat down upon his back; the valley became a furnace.

A blackness gathered before his eyes and he knew that he was going to faint. He fought against it with the last ounce of energy in his tormented body, gritting his teeth, every muscle tensed against the lurch which would pitch him out of the saddle.

All at once the roan, which had been ambling along at a snail's pace, broke into a trot. The unexpected jolt wrenched a shout of pain from Fisher's dust caked lips.

He rolled over sidewise and dropped like a stone. His feet were still wedged in the stirrups. He was dragged along through loose sand—into oblivion.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on the broad of his back. A thick set, solemn looking man kneeling beside him was withdrawing a hypodermic from his forearm.

"Message?" he whispered. "Message for the colonel from Lieutenant Davron. In my pocket."

The man nodded.

"We found it. The colonel heard late last night. The column's on its way. Don't worry about anything, *mon petit*. You're through worrying for a long, long time."

Some one said something Fisher could not catch.

The medical man looked up.

"This one?" he answered with a slight shrug. "Oh, no. Might as well send him straight back to the base. He's all through. Absolutely through."

The morphine had blunted Fisher's senses. A delicious quietude enveloped him. He did not care whether he lived or died. Nothing mattered. Overhead the sky was a luminous green and the hilltops were splashed with gold and crimson by the setting sun. In the blue twilight, in the dust, the column was swinging by, rank upon rank, an endless stream of men. Fisher heard the tread of the hobnailed boots and the clink of bayonet scabbards, and gradually as the night thickened these sounds grew blurred, and he fell asleep.

WHEN Fisher opened the door of the studio he heard Mourelle call out:

"All right, folks. I'm mixing a fresh batch. I'll be with you in one minute."

The studio was full of people, all talking at once. As soon as they caught sight of Fisher, however, they stopped dead, staring at him with fixed, rather artificial smiles on their lips.

"Well, bless my soul," exclaimed Lorring, the fat, bearded painter. "I do declare! It's Fisher!"

"Who?" Mourelle cried from the pantry.

There was a clatter of glasses. He came hurrying into the room, wiping his hands on a kitchen towel.

"Why, so it is!" he shouted. "It's Monte! For the love of Pete! We haven't seen you since—when was it? Let me see. Last March—April, May, June, July and August. Five months. How the time flies!"

They crowded around, shaking his hand, flinging a hundred questions at him.

"Where you been all this time?" Mourelle demanded. "Home?"

"Wherever he's been he's acquired a magnificent coat of tan," chuckled Lorring. "I'll bet he's been living dangerously on the beach at Juan-les-Pins. Tell me, Monte—been living dangerously these days?"

Fisher grinned good naturedly. He had no chance of getting a word in edgewise.

"And look at his head!" cried the girl who had once worn earrings of green jade. "Samson has been shorn of his locks. Where's the girl, Monte, you big brute? You should have brought her along. We're just dying to meet her."

"I never—" he began.

"She's tamed him," laughed the girl called Millie. "She's made him throw away his mackinaw. Poor old Monte."

"Poor Monte nothing," asserted Mourelle. "I'm deeply injured. Why didn't you ask us to the wedding, you poor Swede? How about a drink? Who is she, Monte? Do we know her?"

"You're all wrong," he protested. "I—"

"I have it!" cried Lorring, smiting his forehead. "I remember everything. Millie sent him away to join the Foreign Legion. He dashed out of the house at five in the morning. How did you like the Legion, Monte? Meet any fellow roughnecks?"

Fisher said nothing. For six months he had known hunger, thirst and pain, fear and anger and red hate. He had killed his man with his naked hands; he had seen other men shot down and mangled. He saw again the luminous, sun drenched hills of the Riff, and his ears rang with the echoing crash of the guns.

He could not possibly tell these people where he had been or what he had done. They would not believe him. He could hardly believe it himself, even though his left hand, tucked away in his pocket, was crumpled and useless.

He took a cocktail off the tray Mourelle held in front of him.

"Here's how!"

"Be a sport, Monte," Mourelle insisted. "What's all the mystery about? Where did you get that coat of tan? How come the close cropped nut? Why the brand new suit?"

"That tastes like another," Fisher declared, reaching for the tray. "Say, it's

good to be back, believe me! Good is no name for it! Where have I been? Just messing about. Lorring hit the nail on the head—I was at Juan-les-Pins for awhile, lying out in the sun. It's quite the thing these days. Nice place, Juan."

The commotion he had caused gradually subsided. A little later, while he was leaning out the window looking at the lights of Paris, the girl called Millie came and leaned beside him.

She stared at him curiously.

"There's something I've been wanting to ask you," she said. "What's wrong with your arm, Monte? Anything special?"

"Nothing much," he told her. "Had a slight accident. Wrist's smashed, you know."

"Oh." There was an awkward pause. "There's just one other thing I'd like to know." He saw that her face was quite white. "Are you really entitled to wear the ribbon of the *Croix de Guerre*, Monte? Just between friends—are you?"

"I'd forgotten that," he grumbled. "Yes, I guess I am. It's mine all right. You see—"

"I knew it all along!" she whispered. "I've been so frightened!"

She turned to the crowded room.

"It's not a joke," she sobbed. "You idiots, can't you use your eyes? Monte's really been in the Foreign Legion. He's been wounded and he's got the *Croix de Guerre*, and it's all my fault!"

Tears rained down her cheeks.

"It's all right, Millie," he assured her. "Don't cry. I had it coming my way. I'm darn' glad I did it." He smiled sheepishly at the startled faces gaping at him through the haze of tobacco smoke. "Yep," he confessed. "it's true—but you can take it from me, I am cured. From now on I'm a decadent. I want to wallow in comfort and bathe in luxury. No more rough stuff for me, ever!"

And he meant it.

SALUD, SEÑOR!

By WALT COBURN

SALUD, SEÑOR! This most excellent wine warms the thin blood of an old man who this day mourns the death of a friend. And, as you may see by the miserable quality of these clothes, I am a poor man. Poverty stricken in money and health. The skin hangs loosely on my shriveled bones; my hair has grown white as your Northern snows, thin as the watered wine I am forced by poverty to drink. *Salud!*

Eh? The revolution? *Sí, señor,* it is, as your American newspapers say, very much the comic opera. My people are grown in body and in years, but so many of them are but children in their hearts. They play at the game of war; that is true, señor. And to the men of your country it is perhaps extremely ludicrous. Even as the actions of the American tourist who comes down here from his land of wealth and freedom to drink the

stuff sold across the bar and go home very drunk are apt to sometimes appear somewhat comic to us. And not all of my people are able to see the tragedy of it. I have seen a man lose his wealth at a roulette wheel at yonder casino. He killed himself. There is not comedy there, my friend. Those children and the wife who mourn his passing can see nothing of the comic there.

At sunrise this morning a young man in the prime of life stood with his straight back to the adobe wall and smiled as they shot him down. Was that comedy? *Sí, señor*, I saw you there, together with other gentlemen of the press. Eh? No, señor, not his relative. I was but his friend who looked on. I returned his smile, his salute. The tears did not come until later, my friend, when I took his body and buried it, and knelt there with the *padre* whose hands held the shovel that filled the grave. *Sí, señor*, the ragged one was the *padre*. On account of the law of banishment, he must go in disguise, his crucifix and rosary well hidden in the lining of his ragged coat. You saw nothing of the comic on the face of that man.

Sí, that young man knew how to die. Though he was more poet than soldier, more scholar than firebrand. You were watching as he unbuttoned his white shirt and bared his breast for the bullets. His only request was that they would not mar the face. He died as a brave man should die, giving with his own lips the order to aim and fire, and there was no weakness in his voice. Even though it was a voice the *Señor Dios* meant for song, rather than the calling of orders military. So died my good friend, the Captain Aurelio De La Guerra. To his memory, *señor, salud!*

His father was my friend. His land grants covered as much fertile country as your larger states. His cattle numbered many thousands. His horses were of the finest stock procurable. The title of his lands dated far back to the days when Coronado journeyed north seeking the seven cities of Cibola. His *fiestas* were honored by the most beautiful women in Mexico; El Presidente Porfirio Diaz himself liked to come there. No finer wine ever came into Mexico than that which filled the casks on his *hacienda*. Solid gold were the images in the chapel.

One heard the laughter of children, the music of the guitar and the songs of love. Those days when that young man whom you saw smile at death was but a baby. His father, Don Diego De La Guerra was my patron. Like his son, a singer of love songs, a maker of poetry. But do not imagine that he was weak in courage. When it came his time to die, his last gesture was one of courage. It was I, señor, who dug his grave and with the help of that same *padre* whom you saw today in rags, I laid him gently in it, my own *serape* shielding his handsome face from the earth.

It is, sometimes, a pity that we can not all of us laugh at the same things. To many of your country, my people appear comic—eh? *Gracias, señor*. I saw you there at the death of the young man who was my friend. I saw you again at the little cemetery. And you did not smile. Otherwise, señor, though I were dying and a drop of it meant resurrection, I could not accept your wine. A man is never poor, señor, who still retains his pride and his honor.

My eyes are cleansed from the shedding of tears and the *Señor Dios* bestows upon them the gift of seeing into the hearts of men. Like the eyes of that ragged *padre* who has spent his three times twenty years listening to the sins and sorrows of mankind. There are many of our people who call for their priest only when they are about to die. That, to those who do not understand the hearts of children who are happy and carefree in laughter and fearful only when darkness approaches, is also comic. But to the *padre*, there is nothing to cause laughter there. He sees but that which calls for mercy and pity and forgiveness.

Even as that young man this morning of his last sunrise, forgave those poor

soldiers who aimed their rifle barrels at his bared chest.

But there was no pity nor forgiveness in his heart last week when he led his soldiers against that adobe fort. When he rode at the head of his ragged, half starved troops and with his own hand killed that General Hermano Vicente Gomez. *Dios*, what a soldier he appeared that day! And it seemed to those of us who watched, that his patron saint must be riding in front to shield that *caballero* from the many bullets that came at him from the federal rifles. And then, when he had killed that General Hermano Vicente Gomez, he camped his troops and fed them and found for them the clothes they lacked.

The main force of the federal army was rapidly advancing. Captain Aurelio De La Guerra was aware of their movements. He well knew the folly of further fighting. And that night he called together his officers and men and made them a speech that was filled with wisdom and words of guidance. As a father talks to his children, so did my young friend address his men. He counseled them to desert this lost cause which, as you know, is one that must die in its infancy because it is not at heart a righteous one. He instructed them to retake the town in the name of the government and so hold it until the arrival of the big army which you saw enter the town but two days ago. And when he had done speaking, he bade them farewell and rode away into the night, alone and unattended. Was that not a brave thing, señor?

And today your people read their papers and laugh because of the fickleness of those soldiers who, when danger threatened, ran like sheep back into the government fold. They do not know that those men were picked soldiers who would willingly have died for Captain Aurelio De La Guerra. To a man they had been born and raised on the rancho of their leader's father, Don Diego. Today their secret prayers go to the *Señor Dios* for the repose of the soul of their captain who was too fine and too brave and too kind of heart to lead them into death.

Perhaps you think it was the sun that made the tears in the eyes of those men who looked along their rifle barrels to aim at the heart of that young captain who had, but a week before, been their leader? Their aim was excellent. Aurelio himself had chosen them for the task and with his hands loaded their guns and placed blank cartridges in two of the eight guns so that each might gain comfort in some degree from the thread of hope that theirs might be the gun with no bullet in the load. No, you did not know of those things, señor. Nor did the other gentlemen of the press.

Why should we of Mexico further bare our hearts for the blade of ridicule in the hands of those who can not understand? Only that you did not write to your paper in that manner is why I sit here now at your table and accept this excellent wine which my pocket can not afford. My last peso went for the purchase of clean garments for my young friend. Eh? *Bueno salud, señor!*

FUTILE? Foolish, that killing of General Hermano Gomez? Perhaps. It is not for me to judge, señor. I know only those things which I know. The cause, señor, that lies behind the cause of that foolhardiness of my young friend in so throwing away his life. He made no effort to resist capture when they came upon him alone there in the hills. Unmounted, because he had taken the saddle from his horse and turned the animal back to its freedom. A splendid gelding of Arabian strain, that horse. My young friend had broken it as a colt and cared for it as only a lover of horses can.

He was unarmed when they found him. Sitting in the shade of a tree, preparing his soul for its journey. You saw him when they brought him in. He was smiling and smoking the *cigarro* given him by the leader of the men who captured him. As free of sorrow as a bridegroom on his wedding journey. He spoke to me as he rode past on the miserable mule they had given him. I dared do nothing but smile

as I returned his gay salute. Because I felt that he wished me to share his ability to smile. I, who had taught him to ride and had been almost as a father is to an only son. I, the only one who could wholly share the fullness of this thing which he had done. I, who had kept the vow to my patron, the man who was his father.

If there is sin in what I have done in so fulfilling that vow, may the Son of God and the Holy Virgin intercede with God in the behalf of my immortal soul. May there be some one left behind me who will offer up a last mass for the repose of my soul—

The honor of a man can not be weighed in gold or silver or in precious jewels. Because, when a man sells his honor, does it not cease to be known by that name? It is, señor, immortal. Death can not kill it. Rather, there are cases when death but gives the final polish to its brilliancy. Like the wiping of a Damascus blade with a bit of velvet from the gown of a beautiful princess. And so I say, señor, that ragged as I am, empty as are the pockets of my poor garments, yet I am richer than a king when I retain my honor. Your wine has given this thin old blood of mine a faster pulse. I am more than content, señor; I am quite happy.

Eh? The Don Diego De La Guerra? A true Castilian, my patron. Gay as the colors of a *serape* in the morning sun, singing his songs in a voice that the *Señor Dios* gives but to a chosen few. Handsome, sensitive as a child, a lover of beauty, whether the beauty be in a sunset, a horse, a flower, or a woman. His father feared a little that Diego might be soft and weak in courage. Had that old father lived to see that day when Don Diego stood alone in his patio with a naked sword in one hand, a *pistola* in the other, and piled those human dogs of *rurales* like cordwood, one upon the other, then he would have known that there was no softness, no weak fiber in the courage of Don Diego.

Madre de Dios, that was a fight! Though I saw it not, I came later. And though it was a day when the sun shone never more brightly, I swear it to you, señor, that when my eyes filled with the horror of it, all became dark as midnight. Perhaps I swooned. It was long ago and I was younger. It is scarcely probable that a strong man should faint like a woman. Yet I felt nothing but darkness. A darkness sticky with congealing blood that stood in pools on the tiles under the dead bodies of those human dogs.

Dios! Though it were a thousand years hence I shall not forget that darkness through which I groped, calling out, whispering, shouting the name of my good patron. And through the darkness there shone the red of blood.

Then the light came again into my darkened eyes, but my brain seemed clotted with red. I could not speak, could not hear. I knew, by then, what had happened. That the enemies of the patron, this man who had replaced the friend of the De La Guerras as *el presidente* of Mexico, had stuck. They had chosen that time of the year when the *vaqueros* were out with the cattle. When I, the *major-domo* of them all, was also gone. When but a few terrified *mozos* would be there at the *hacienda* to defend it. They feared not the defense of the patron who was a maker of songs. They held him weak in their stupid minds.

Besides, there were a hundred of them. And that *hombre* who led them was a coarse grained fellow, a butcher. A despoiler of women. I found his body there in a pool of blood, at the door of the bedroom of the Señora De La Guerra. Don Diego had run him through the heart with a dueling rapier that was hung as an ornament there on the wall.

I tell you, señor, I dreaded opening that door. Though the latch was one that a child could open, so weak was I from horror and fear, that I must use both hands to lift it and push open that door. *Madre de Dios*, but that picture was stamped upon my heart so that, when I am dead, it will still remain there long after my bones are dust.

She lay there on her bed, señor. Quite dead, the hilt of the jeweled dagger that had been an ornament on her dressing

table, red with her heart's blood. There was a smile on her most beautiful face. I knew, as if I had been there and witnessed it, that the patron had kissed her, then released her white soul from that so beautiful body. He had saved her from the defiling touch of that butcher. And then he stepped out into the patio and fought them until they overwhelmed him with their numbers.

Even as I knelt there, beside the dead body of the señora, trying to force a little prayer from my lips for this most beautiful, most kind woman who was more saint than merely human, I heard the cry of a child. *Dios*, in the numbness of my suffering, I had forgotten the four-year-old baby boy who was the pride of the house of the De La Guerra. Little Aurelio, named for his grandfather, the great soldier and adventurer. He was hidden in a great oaken chest that had once been owned by Napoleon of France.

I lifted him out and hid his child's eyes from the horror there in the room. He clung to me and asked for his mother. He wanted his pony. He called aloud for his father. And I, señor, must keep back my tears and must smile. May the saints in heaven forgive me the lies I used that day to comfort that child. And not until I had gotten him to sleep in another part of the *hacienda* could I return to my task of burying her who had been so kind to those of us who called Don Diego our patron. We were wont to speak of her as Santa Cecelia. . . .

They had taken Don Diego prisoner. I knew that he would never return there. Even as I knew that I could no longer return. I buried her there, señor, beneath the altar of the chapel that had been raped of its golden images. Only the clay image of the Santa Cecelia, patron saint of her whom I had buried there, remained unbroken, untouched. I found some blessed candles and left them burning. And when I left, I locked that heavy carved door which had always remained open, night and day. I signed myself and left. I had done what there was to be done, in the best manner that I knew how.

Then I took the little Aurelio and rode away from that place. I looked back from the mesa above. I saw flames and black smoke arising. I had set fire to it, that place that had been my home. I was so destroying it that it might never be soiled by those who would now claim the lands under a new grant from this *el presidente* who was an enemy to the De La Guerra name. If there were a sin, then, señor, I shall willingly atone for it when I die. *Gracias, señor; salud!*

When I had sent the word to the *vaqueros* to ride for the mountains and there remain until I rode there to meet them, I left little Aurelio with good friends who would hide him. They would have killed him, baby though he was, señor. Then I went to the *cuartel* there in the city to find my patron. Eh? Danger? Does one think of such things as danger when the life of a loved one is threatened?

I was admitted. *El commandante* himself was there in the courtyard, playing the peacock, his sword banging the tiled walk as he strutted up and down, twisting at his perfumed mustaches. And there, inside the high walls, together with prisoners of all colors, many of them foul with drink and covered with sores and vermin, stood the patron. *Madre de Dios*, I must look a second time before my poor eyes knew him.

I HAVE told you that he was handsome. His hair was thick to a luxurious density that would scarce permit the combing of it. Black as the wing of a crow. His face, smoothly shaved except for the upper lip that carried a neatly pointed mustache, had always been lightened by smiles. His eyes, long lashed and dark, were soft always with kindness and the reflected beauty he always saw about him. His clothes, from the skin out, were the finest of linen and silk and velvet that money could purchase.

Behold, then, señor, that man I looked at. In ragged cotton that was soiled with dried blood. The face above it terrible in its stern lines. Gaunt as a starved

animal, hollow of cheek. And out of two black sockets burned red coals of eyes that held nothing of softness. And the hair on his head, I swear by my patron saint, was as white as drifted snow, tangled and flecked with blood. He was looking at me, yet I knew that he did not see me. Not until I cried out. Then he recognized me and tried to find a smile with which to greet me. But his lips would never smile again. It was pitiful, terrible.

I took him apart from that crowd of lepers and drunken wretches. I found water and bathed him. I took off my own clothes and dressed him in them. And he submitted as a dutiful child submits, scarcely aware of what I was doing. It was as if he were already dead.

I had seen the heart of my patron touched many times, by the little things of life. I had seen tears spring quickly to his eyes when he beheld the grief of a stranger. And yet he could not weep now, in his own terrible suffering. No tears could cool the burning intensity of his eyes. They were hot coals, red as the blood I washed from the cuts on his body made by the blades of the *rurales*.

He had spoken no word as yet. Grief had paralyzed his tongue. The *commandante* kept up his strutting, his sword clanking, his smile mocking my patron. And had Don Diego dared resent it, the dozen bayonets of the watching soldiers would have impaled his poor body.

For some reason—perhaps that peacock of a man wished to further torture me with the pitiful spectacle of my beloved patron—I was allowed to remain. Throughout the day. And after the siesta hour, the *commandante* finished his wine and light repast of nuts and sweetmeats. He lighted a long *cigarro* and ordered his table cleared. He called in several preening officers who reeked of cheap perfume and powder. And that *commandante* ordered the guards to bring Don Diego De La Guerra to him for court-martial trial.

Don Diego strode to the table and stood there. The smile that twisted the lips of my patron was a wordless curse so terrible that the *commandante* lost something of his composure.

"I find you guilty, after weighing the evidence," said that cruel one, "of resisting the soldiers of this republic of Mexico. But perhaps you had provocation. I shall, therefore, withhold sentence until some future date when I have learned more of the facts governing your case. At the hour of dusk you may leave the *cuartel*. The liberty of the city is yours. You will, however, remain within the outer limits of the town. No man can say that General Hermano Vicente Gomez is not just."

Don Diego De La Guerra pulled himself erect. Have you ever heard the voice of a deaf mute learning to make audible words? Then, señor, you may gain some very slight conception of how the voice of my patron sounded when he spoke. In a flat voice that has been drained dry of all tone. A voice that might come from the lips of a man dead.

"Your lie deceives no one save yourself, *hombre*," said my patron. And in using the word "*hombre*", he was insulting the peacock in a most degrading manner, "Tonight, when I walk through that gate, I walk to a death. You will have your men murder me. It will be said that Diego De La Guerra was shot while attempting to escape. I am to be killed, then, by the cowardly method of Ley Del Fuega. You are not even giving me my right to die as a brave man facing the rifles of your firing squad. For that insult, *hombre*, I swear by my faith in God, you shall some day pay."

And my patron turned and walked away. Nor did they have the courage to halt him. I followed. I was walking behind him, prepared to die with him, as he passed through the gateway, before the staring eyes of the guards.

Dios, there was a man!

When we had gone along the street some distance, I sought to lead him into a place where he might find food and wine. But he shook his head.

"Food would but choke me," he said. "The rarest wine in the world would be as

vinegar. Tell me, my dear, sorrowing friend, what there is to tell."

So I told him, señor, of all I had done. I assured him of the safety of little Aurelio. And for a moment I hoped that tears would melt that ice in his heart. But, no.

The sun was setting. A hush seemed to have fallen across the place where we stood by a garden wall. He reached out with his two hands and gripped my shoulders. His eyes burned into mine. I tried not to tremble.

He said:

"My friend. You have earned the right to be so called. I would make but one last request. I give into your hands the keeping of my only child. A son. He is the last of my name. I now dedicate the life of that son to the task of avenging the terrible wrong inflicted upon his parents. Rear him carefully. There is gold buried in spots you know, for you helped in its hiding. Use that gold as you see fit. Make my only son, my Aurelio, into a strong man. Make of him such a brave soldier as was his grandsire whose name he bears. And when the time comes, tell him the tale of his mother's death, and his father's. Arm him and send him to kill the man who has ordered this crime committed. Let Aurelio De La Guerra kill General Hermano Vicente Gomez. Kneel with me here and repeat after me that solemn vow."

So we knelt there, señor, in the dust that was like powdered gold in the last light of the sun. And I repeated, word for word, that vow.

And when we rose, my patron embraced me.

"Farewell, my one true friend," he said. "From here, I walk alone. Come at dawn with the *padre* and bury me in the cemetery that holds the dust of my father. *Adios.*"

And I stood there, half blind from tears, and watched him walk away. The sun caressed his snowy hair like a last benediction. I saw him no more alive . . .

Eh? A thousand pardons, señor. No, I am not cold. I knew not that I shivered. I forgot I have been so long silent. Forgive the miserable manners of an old man grown lax in such things. I was hardly aware that the sun had set and that night was coming. No, no more wine, I thank you. You have been kind, señor. And patient. And again I thank you because you do not make me the offer of money. I am dressed in clean clothes. Cheap cotton, to be sure, but clean. I have spent the past hours with a friend. That is well. You have not laughed at me. I drink the last of this wine in my glass, standing in respect to our brief friendship.

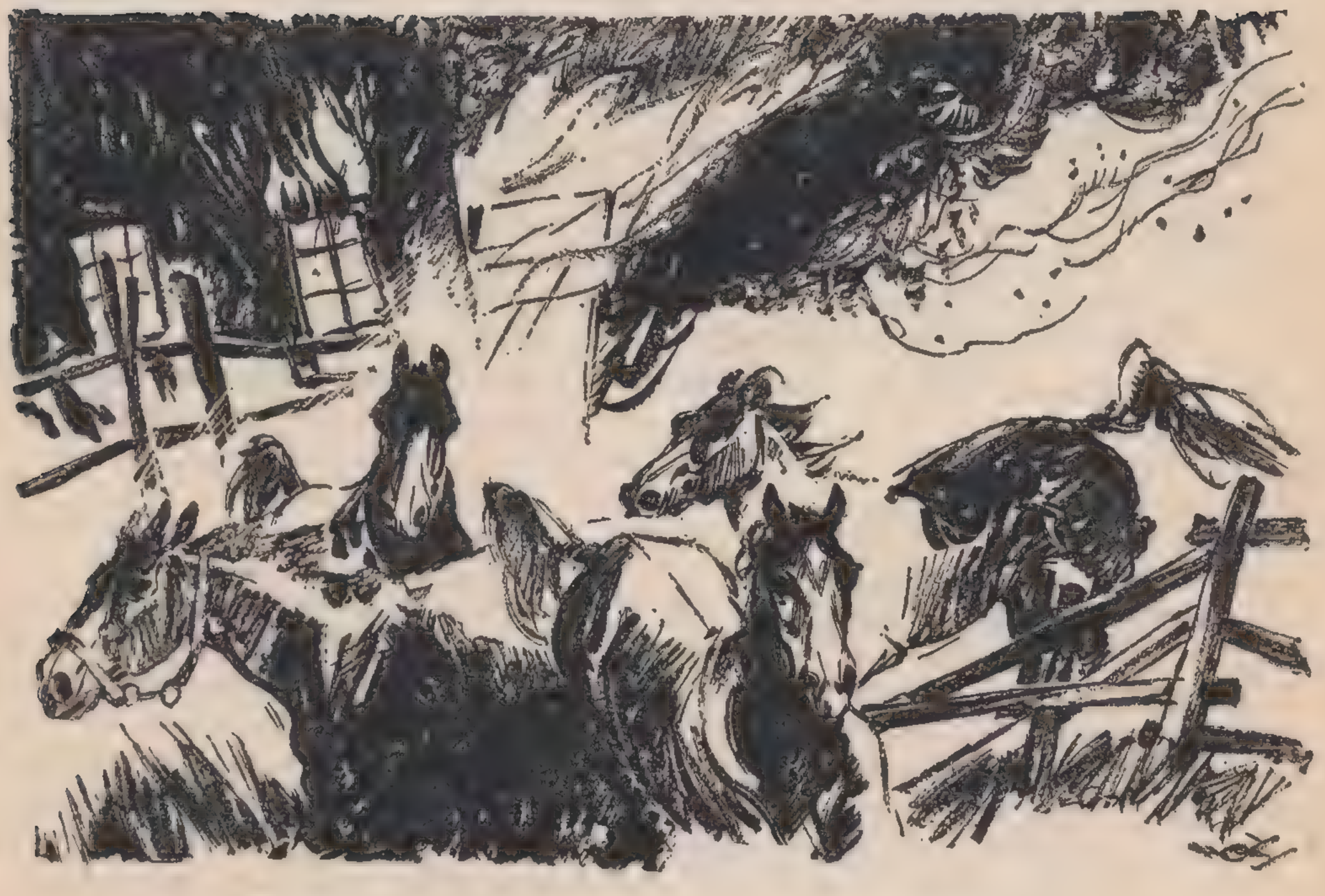
Eh? No, señor, we do not meet again. You shall sit here at your table. You shall watch me as I walk down the street. Your eyes, señor, are younger than mine. Do you, perhaps, see the figure of a man standing near the wall at the end of the street? A soldier who stands there on guard? *Sí.* So I thought. Perhaps, señor, as I near the end of the street, there where the shadows are thickest, it would be best if you left your table and went inside. Eh? No, señor, there is no other way. To be sure, there at the trial this morning, I was set free. It is the Ley Del Fuega. I am no general, no son of a don to be given the honor of a splendid end.

Eh? You honor me, señor. I thank you. And that my step may be firm and brave, there at the shadow, I repeat what you offer as a toast. To a brave man of honor! *Salud!*

Adios, señor!

By BILL ADAMS

A Story of a Man's Love for his Horse



SOLOMON AND THE BRIGHT PEARL

ON THE north side of the cañon, foothills covered with sage, sumac, greasewood and chaparral rose steeply from the creek toward the mountains behind them. The greasewood grew so tall and thick that a man could scarce force a way through it. The sage was as high as a man's waist, in places almost to his shoulders. Chaparral was a stiff impenetrable jungle.

By night coyotes howled, owls hooted. In summer the air shimmered above the little two mile long cañon.

Day after day no breeze stirred the foliage of cottonwood, sycamore or oak. The creek ran low, only a crystal trickle flowing from pool to pool amid the polished boulders. The cañon was filled with scents of sun baked grasses.

Where the cañon opened out it formed a hundred acre basin which was Doc Jepson's ranch. A wide fire-break, behind it a jungle of greasewood, sumac and sage, bordered his gently sloping orchards of orange and lemon. The horse barn stood hidden among widespread old live oak

trees, a little way back from the cañon and out of sight of the house. Meeting at the south side of the basin, the roads from house and barn wound away through low hills beside the winding creek toward a fertile flat valley. Fifteen miles away at the other end of the valley was the small town whither Doc Jepson hauled his lemons and oranges.

Doc Jepson's horse barn was a big airy building built after the fashion of many California barns, with the side behind the stalls and with one end open.

Solomon was a big barreled, deep chested horse with a broad back and enormous shoulders and flanks. His legs were pillars, his hoofs far spread. His tail and his mane were thick and wavy. He was jet black, not a white hair anywhere on him. His eyes were large, and usually they were soft.

While Solomon was hitched to it no wagon ever bogged down to stay unless it were loaded beyond the power of any horse. If ever a wagon did bog down, it stayed where it was till Solomon was brought along. Once Solomon was hitched to it and the teamster had said, "All right, Sol," the black horse leaned into his collar, stiffened his shoulders and flanks, went down almost upon his knees —and away went the wagon.

When it was the time of spring ploughing in the orange and lemon orchards Flora and Jumbo, Maud and Kate and Sam, each had a wire muzzle fitted over the nose. But no teamster ever had to put a wire muzzle on Solomon to prevent him from taking bites of the juicy young foliage. When it was hot summer weather and the flies bit and a horse longed for something to rub his sides against, no teamster ever had to pull on Solomon's bridle to keep him from thrusting his great ribs against the trees and knocking the young fruit off.

"Solomon, you old rascal," Doc Jepson would say. "You're like that wise king in the Bible. If it wasn't for the women you'd be just about perfect."

Hitch him up to work with Flora, Maud or Kate, on wagon, plough or cultivator, and the big black horse would work as quietly and well as when he worked with Sam or Jumbo. But turn him out at the end of the week into pasture with the other animals and no matter how succulent in spring, or how sun sweetened in summer the grasses might be, he paid no heed to them.

All he did was to run and to worry the mares. From one to another of the mares he would go, with his black ears laid back and his yellow teeth bared, and never a chance to eat or to rest would they have till he had been driven back into the corral.

No matter how hard he had worked in a hot sun all through the week, the moment he was turned out to pasture back went his ears and up went his lip and he was making for the nearest mare. So while Sam and Jumbo, Flora, Maud and Kate, wandered at will or dozed in the shade by the creek from Saturday evening till Monday morning Solomon spent his weekends alone in the corral. For awhile he would stand with his ears laid back, watching Pearl nosing the hay in her stall beyond the two sliding bars at the south end of the barn. Presently he would walk to the far end of the corral and, with his neck over the fence, watch the pastured animals with a look of longing in his eyes.

Sometimes Doc Jepson would stroll down from the ranch-house on a Sunday and, smoking his pipe on a boulder in the horse corral, thoughtfully look at the big black horse asleep in the shade. And the big black would lift his head and look up drowsily, as much as to say, "Why can't a horse that's been helping you lift your mortgage all through the week ever have a bite of wild feed?"

"Solomon, you old rascal," Doc Jepson would say, "I know just how much attention you'd pay to the wild feed."

For a time he would sit thinking about his mortgage and the poor price his fruit was bringing and the high price of hay and barley. Scarcely a month passed without some one offering him a fine price for the big black.

"I *could* get along without you, Solomon," he would murmur. Then he would

go into Pearl's stall and rub his hand along her sleek neck and talk to her awhile. "You're a bright little Pearl," he would say. "I haven't got that chain yet, but I'm going to get it next time I'm in town."

And the little bay driving mare would snuggle her nose against him as if she understood all about his mortgage worries and did not care one way or the other about the chain he was always threatening to get for her just as long as he would come to the barn and pet her once in awhile.

Pearl never took the least notice of Solomon when, after his hay and his barley were gone, he would stand watching her from his stall with an evil gleam in his eyes. Even when he was turned loose in the corral over the weekend, and would come behind her and stretch his great neck in over the sliding bars, she ignored him utterly. Though he would often stand there for minutes together with his ears laid back and his teeth bared she would never so much as glance round. For as long as the big black horse was left loose in the corral she stayed quietly in her stall. But when he was tied at his manger on week day nights there was no such thing as keeping the little bay tied. No matter what sort of knot, or how many knots, might be put into her halter rope, she would work at the rope with her teeth till she had it untied. As soon as she was loose she would back out of her stall and slide back the top bar till one end fell to the ground. Then, light as a deer, she would leap the lower bar and wander peacefully off into the corral.

The workhorses' stalls were wide. There was plenty of room for a little thing such as Pearl to join either of them at the manger. From manger to manger she would go, picking up a few grains of barley here, or a wisp of sweet hay there, and never one of the big work animals so much as laying its ears back or dreaming of biting her—except black Solomon.

When she was finished in Sam's stall she would back quietly out, pass well behind Solomon's restless heels and enter Jumbo's stall on the other side of him. Having made the round of the workhorses' stalls and picked up such tidbits as tickled her fancy, she would go to the corral gate that led out into the barn yard and work at the latch till she had the gate open. Then she would pass innocently by the closed side of the barn and come to its open end, where she could reach in to the hay in the mow.

With her appetite entirely satisfied, she would wander about for awhile, nibbling an oak leaf here and a blade of grass there, and presently come to the gate that led down from the barn yard over the creek to the pasture beyond. She would open that gate too, but it was seldom that she entered the pasture. Having opened the gate as if to prove that she could, she would go back and stand with her nose against the closed side of the barn, and there when they came down to feed and to harness the work teams in the morning the hired man and Doc Jepson would find her.

"You think you're a bright little Pearl, don't you?" Doc Jepson would say. "Getting yourself untied and opening every gate on the place! Next time I'm in town I'm going to get a chain to tie you with. You'll not get loose then. Come along now!" And without so much as a hand on her nose the little bay would follow Doc Jepson into her stall.

Every so often Doc Jepson would say to the hired man—

"Joe, next time I go to town remind me to get that chain for the driving mare."

And every time he went to town, what with thinking of his mortgage and the low price of fruit and the high price of horse feed, he would forget all about it.

IT WAS one blazing hot Sunday of mid-September that Doc Jepson finally made up his mind to sell Solomon. On Monday morning when he was starting to town with a load of lemons Joe said—

"Doc, did you want I should get that chain for the driving mare?"

"No, never mind it today," said Doc Jepson. "There's a lot of fruit to haul

down to the packing house and you'd best get back as soon as you can. I'm going to take Solomon down and sell him to Billy Hendricks on Friday and I'll get it then."

It was a blazing hot week, that week of mid-September. No air stirred over the cañon from morning to night or from night to morning. The creek ran almost dry. With the big black horse hitched to the orchard truck, Doc Jepson hauled the boxes of fruit from his orchards and stacked them at the roadside ready to load the wagon as soon as it came back from the packing house. Day after day the lemon pickers with moist faces and sweat marks on their denim shirts climbed up and down their picking ladders in a torrid sun.

On Wednesday morning Doc Jepson hitched the little bay mare to the buggy and drove his wife off to town to take the train for the Coast and cool weather thirty miles away.

On Thursday morning while Joe and Doc Jepson were loading the wagon at the roadside close to the house the hired girl came from the kitchen and sat wearily down on the porch step.

"Go ahead and pack your grip," called Doc Jepson. "You'd best ride down on the wagon with Joe and take the train to the Coast. You can come back as soon as it's cooler. This weather won't last long at this time of year."

On Thursday afternoon the pickers finished their job and left the ranch. What with cooking for Joe and himself, what with washing the dishes and looking after his irrigating pump and trucking the last of the fruit from the orchards and helping Joe load the wagon, Doc Jepson had no time to take the black horse down to Billy Hendricks' place when Friday came.

When Joe started to town with the last load of lemons on Saturday morning he was dressed in his store suit. Beside him sat Doc Jepson, with the lines in his hands. At breakfast Doc Jepson had said:

"We're about caught up with the work, Joe. You'd best go spend the weekend down at the Coast. I'll come down and meet you at the depot Monday morning. I'll lead Solomon down behind the buggy and leave him at Hendricks'. I'll not go out of my way to do it today."

On the road home Doc Jepson let the four horses go slowly. Even Solomon was feeling the heat. The sun blazed on his broad black back. Not a breath of air stirred. Not a bird whistled. Save for a snake that glided now and again from one side of the road to the other, or for a horned toad that ceased sunning himself in the dust and ran into the dry weeds to hide till the wagon was gone by, there was no life stirring. Hunched on the wagon seat, Doc Jepson sat with his big shady hat pulled down over his eyes and flicked his long whip at the horse flies.

It was well into the afternoon when Doc Jepson unharnessed his team and, with the exception of Solomon, turned all the work animals out into pasture. Halfway from the barn to the house he stopped. Except for a disappointed whinny from the black horse, there was not a sound. The sun blazed down on hills and cañon from a glaring, breathless sky.

"I'll go shut down the pump," said Doc Jepson to himself. "I'll saddle up Bird and ride down to the Coast myself. That's what I'll do. Tomorrow night I'll ride back. Everything'll be all right till tomorrow night without me."

Having shut down the pump, Doc Jepson saddled Bird and tied him outside the corral. Then he filled Pearl's manger with hay and filled up a big tub of water for her.

"There you are, you bright little Pearl," he said as she snuggled her nose against him. "Monday morning I'll get that chain for you."

With the little bay's needs attended to he went into the corral, lighted his pipe and sat on a boulder looking at Solomon.

The big black horse lifted his head and looked reproachfully at Doc Jepson.

"Solomon," said Doc Jepson. "Solomon, you old rascal!"

The big black rose to his feet, walked

to Doc Jepson and looked at him from soft reproachful eyes.

"Solomon," said Doc Jepson, "if it wasn't for the money I'm owing I'd cross-fence the pasture instead of selling you. Then there'd be a good pasture I could turn you out to all by yourself, old boy."

The big black horse set his nose against his master's breast.

"Solomon," murmured Doc Jepson. "Solomon—if it wasn't for the tight hole I'm in I'd never be selling you."

With his black nose pressed against his master's breast, the big black horse sighed deeply.

Bowing his head, Doc Jepson laid his cheek against the black's great head and fondled his glossy ears.

"Goodby, Solomon, goodby," murmured Doc Jepson.

Passing from the corral gate, Doc Jepson wiped a hand across his eyes. As he rode from the barn yard the black horse stretched his neck over the gate and whinnied. But Doc Jepson didn't turn round. With his jaw set and a sorrowful look in his eyes, he hurried away.

Presently Solomon lay down in the shade, stretched his pillar-like legs and went to sleep. There was not a sound in the cañon.

Night fell. From far up the cañon came the yap of a coyote. An owl hooted in an oak above the barn roof. A coon passed soundlessly along the creek, pausing at every pool to investigate it for frog or fish.

Late in the night Solomon rose and whinnied to the animals in the pasture. No whinny answered him. Till dawn he wandered about the corral or nosed in the mangers. All night the little bay mare stood quietly in her stall.

The sun rose from behind the high hills at the end of the cañon. There was not a sound.

The sun climbed higher. Turning her head, the little bay mare looked toward the corral where Solomon stood with his forelegs knee deep and his nose in the cool clear water. Scattering a silvery spray, he pawed at the water. Pearl's nostrils dilated. The water in her tub was warm and full of hay that had fallen from her manger.

By noon the air over the cañon was like the air in an oven. Quail crouched silent under sage and sumac. A gopher snake that had lately made a meal of a young wood rat sought the shade of a fallen rotted branch. Having both breakfasted and dined in Doc Jepson's chicken house, a blue jay sat on a twig of the branch and screamed. Except for the harsh notes of the jay and for the whinny of the black horse as he now and again called vainly to the horses in the pasture, there was not a sound in the cañon.

From time to time throughout a torrid afternoon the little bay mare fidgeted in her stall. Each time that she did so the big black horse trotted to the sliding bars and bared his yellow teeth at her.

Day passed. The sun sank. Quail came chattering from the brush and wandered in the cañon's open spaces. Dusk was falling when the little bay, with her ears pricked forward and a longing look in her eyes, watched the big black horse walk down to the cool creek again.

NIGHT fell. Seated on a boulder on a hilltop a coyote howled. Seated on a fallen log another replied from across the cañon. An owl hooted in a tree above the barn and was answered by another in a tree beyond the creek. Two bright eyes peered from a hollow tree at the far end of the corral. In a moment the coon had disappeared in the direction of Doc Jepson's chicken house. For a time there was silence while, longing for a drink of cool water, the little bay mare looked round toward the creek.

At a sound of ironshod hoofs from up the cañon Solomon backed out of the stall in which he had been eating, trotted to the corral fence and whinnied. A whinny answered him from up the cañon. Sam and Jumbo appeared in the starry gloom. While they stayed to rub noses with the big black horse the three work

mares passed on along the fence and came to the gate leading into the barn yard.

Owls hooted. Bats wheeled and circled in and out of the dark barn. With his head between the heads of Sam and Jumbo, the black horse dozed in the stifling night. Sam and Jumbo dozed. Flora, Maud and Kate stood dozing by the gate into the barn yard.

Looking from her stall, the little bay mare could just see Solomon asleep at the far end of the corral. With her ears pricked and her delicate nostrils dilating, she watched him.

The sky over the hills at the cañon's far end was growing lighter when the little bay backed silently out of her stall. As she looked over the sliding bars the tip of a round white moon appeared over the distant ridges. Without making a sound she took the top bar in her teeth, slid it back and lowered it to the ground. The moon sailed up, flooding the cañon and corral with light. Coyotes and owls fell silent. From the direction of Doc Jepson's chicken house there came the sound of a low stifled squawk.

Without making a sound, the little bay mare gingerly picked her way through the boulders down to the creek. As she lifted her nose from the cool water Solomon raised his huge head and looked drowsily up at the moon. Until he lowered his head again the mare stood motionless.

While the little bay recrossed the corral and worked at the latch of the gate the work teams slept. None of them stirred or looked up when she pushed the gate open and walked out into the barn yard.

As the bay stood with her nose in the hay mow a coyote sped silently past her heels. Another sped down the open grassy space beyond the creek. Meeting where the roads from house and barn converged, they paused a moment and looked behind them up the moonlit cañon. Next instant they had vanished, terrified gray streaks, down the road toward the valley.

A tiny breeze sprang up, blowing direct down the cañon. Lifting her head, the bay mare sniffed the breeze. The ridges at the far end of the cañon were lighted by a dull red glow that was growing momentarily brighter. A heavy smoke cloud rolled sluggishly beneath the moon, dimming the night.

With a white fluffy feather clinging to its jowl, the coon appeared. Seated on a rock by the water he sniffed the tainted air. Next moment he had vanished among the damp roots of an old rotted tree stump at the creek side. With its gray wings beating soundlessly, a great horned owl flew by above the open space beyond the creek, winging its way toward the valley, heedless of the frightened birds that flew beneath it.

One of the work mares wakened and lifted her head. Seeing the pasture gate wide open, she passed through it into the barn yard. As with a clink of ironshod hoofs the other work mares followed, Solomon lifted his head. Next moment, with his ears laid back and his yellow teeth bared, he had cantered through the corral gate and was thundering down the road toward the valley with the work mares galloping before him. Well in the lead loped the little bay mare.

As Sam and Jumbo trotted along the corral fence and out into the barn yard after the big black horse a sound of crackling filled the night. A hot breeze blew gustily down the cañon. Smoke dimmed the moon's light. Sparks whirled. Flame, leaping from ridge to ridge, swept hungrily through sage and sumac, greasewood and chaparral.

It was close to midnight when Doc Jepson, on his way home, rode through the sleeping little town. Save for the hoofbeats of the white saddle horse there was not a sound. To either side of the valley the mountains loomed against a starry sky.

When the town was a couple of miles behind him Doc Jepson slowed his horse to a walk. With his hands clasped one above the other on the saddle horn and his hat on the back of his head he sat half asleep.

The moon shone upon Doc Jepson and the white saddle horse.

"Solomon," murmured Doc Jepson, "if it wasn't for the hole I'm in I'd never be selling you." His chin sank on his breast again. There was not a sound except the slow tread of the white saddle horse.

Presently a gust of hot wind fanned Doc Jepson's face. Opening his eyes, he looked toward the ridges at the far end of the moonlit valley. A red glow lighted the ridges. Red tongues of flame and smoke clouds rolled up beneath the moon.

As the quirt fell on its flanks the white horse sprang forward. A cloud of dust rose from its galloping hoofs.

"Pearl in the barn and Solomon in the corral, and every one of my work teams doomed in the pasture," gasped Doc Jepson.

With his hat blown away, with hand and heel and voice urging the white horse, Doc Jepson galloped homeward. Three miles from his ranch he stopped. A sheet of flame was rising from where his horse barn stood.

Doc Jepson dismounted beneath a tree at the roadside and sat with his head bowed in his hands.

At a rattle of wheels and thud of galloping hoofs from the direction of the town behind him, Doc Jepson rose and stepped out to the road. A score of townspeople jumped from their rigs and their saddles to gather about him.

Before any one could speak, a sound of hoofbeats came from round a bend in the road. Doc Jepson turned and looked toward the road bend.

With her head held high a little bay mare came loping along in the smoky moonlight. Behind her came Flora and Maud and Kate. Close at their heels, with his ears laid back and his teeth bared, thundered black Solomon. Behind the black horse trotted Jumbo and Sam.

Day broke above a smoky cañon. Here and there about the blackened hillsides groups of townspeople wandered, beating the last of the fire out. From down the valley a cool breeze blew, fresh from the Coast, bearing gray clouds.

With his other horses tied to trees, with Pearl and black Solomon tied to posts at his either side, Doc Jepson sat on his porch steps.

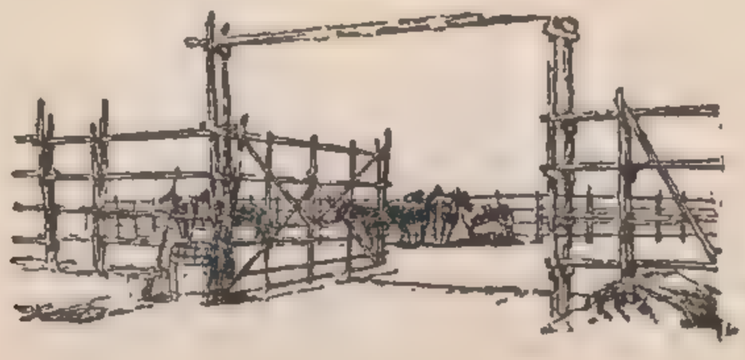
"Solomon," said Doc Jepson. "Solomon! Pearl, my bright little Pearl!"

With her ears pricked forward, the little bay mare pressed her nose against Doc Jepson's breast. Black Solomon pressed his great nose against his master's breast.

"Solomon," murmured Doc Jepson, "I've got to borrow more money and build a new barn. And I'll borrow enough to crossfence the pasture too. My bright little Pearl, I'll build you the best loose box that ever a horse had yet and you'll never be tied again.

"Solomon," said Doc Jepson, "I'll be in a terrible hole. D'ye suppose we can ever pull out?"

With their heads close together the little bay mare and the big black horse snuggled their noses against Doc Jepson's breast.



A Complete Novel of Singapore and a Sinister Oriental Society

By

CHARLES GILSON

The JOHN

CHAPTER I

MIRACLE WORK

FROM the middle of the little rattan footbridge that spanned the shallow, weed choked ditch that in Malaya passed as a river, Ben Seton surveyed the jungle. Look where he liked, even to the rounded hilltops where the red hot sky reflected the sunset from the smooth surface of the Indian Ocean, vegetation was ubiquitous, triumphant and chaotic. It was as if here were a kind of unsystematic and uncontrollable mob rule by every conceivable species of tropic plant—tree, palm, creeper, fern and fungus—struggling silently for the spoils of victory over vanquished humanity.

For two months Seton had not spoken to a fellow white man. For a fortnight he had received no letters. He had had no company save that of Ah Ho, his Cantonese boy, a Malay groom and a Sikh sergeant of police.

Things would not be so bad, if only something would happen. But nothing ever did happen—except the sun and the heat and the jungle. It seemed as if the natural conditions of such a place as Sungei Kalan had been specially and very elaborately ordained solely for mosquitoes and lizards, the lower and more prolific forms of animal and vegetable life.

Though geographically in Province Wellesley and not a stone's throw from the ill defined frontier of Kedah, the village of Sungei Kalan was just about the last place on God's too green and humid

COMPANY

earth. What went on lower down that dark and dirty little tributary of the Merbuk concerned neither Seton nor any one else. So long as the annual *bûnga amas*, or tribute, was duly received at Bangkok, the Siamese Government was well content to let Kedah mismanage itself. In the opinion of a sultan who had swallowed his Malay pride at the bidding of the King of Siam, anything in the way of authorized government was both impractical and likely to prove unprofitable in a country that aspired to nothing but the growing of rice and durians and the production of alluvial tin.

That was before Hochheimer came down to Krapoh at the mouth of the river with something in the way of a concession from Bangkok. He had found pearls on a reef off the coast; and his particular method of getting rich quick converted a Malay fishing village into a kind of cosmopolitan refuse heap for undesirable characters of all nations, creeds and colors.

While the cheerful Orang-laut confined themselves to diving for Hochheimer's

pearls, Klings, Tamils and Chinese appeared as if from out of the earth, with their opium pipes or betel nut, according to taste. Seton kept at a safe distance. It was not his "pidgin"; though he saw strange people come out of the woods and take the jungle path to the main river, trotting along wild eyed with their *sumpitans*, the long bamboo blowpipes of the Malay Negrito.

On this particular evening the silence of the surrounding forest, even the ominous manner in which a flying fox skimmed within a few feet of his solar topee from the shadows of an overhanging *tapang*, made him feel more remote than ever from the worldly activities of the almost visionary Hochheimer.

Leaving the bridge, he somewhat wearily ascended the steps of his bungalow, on the veranda of which he flung himself into a long cane chair. Inside Ah Ho was getting busy with a tough turkey—and rice. Always rice. Day after day the same food, the same clear dawn, the white blazing morning, the cloudburst followed by the steaming afternoon, and the same blood red, still, lonely evening. And nothing happened.

Quite suddenly he sat bolt upright. He was a man well on in the thirties, slimly built but muscular, clean shaven, with clear cut features and a rather pointed nose, reddish hair and brown eyes. He could not have looked more amazed had some extraordinary cataclysm transformed the universe. A shot. The report of a firearm—and at no great distance down the valley.

Ah Ho appeared on the veranda. Even Ah Ho looked surprised.

"Who make bobbery, master?" he asked.

"Keep supper," said Seton. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

ABOUT a mile down the path he came to the post that he himself had driven into the ground by the river bank to mark the frontier, and a little after the jungle opened out into a wilderness of *lalang*. Somewhere about the middle of this clearing was a solitary tree, and one glance in that direction was enough to make the police officer quicken his footsteps. Though he knew he had no business on the north side of that post, he broke into a run—for, suspended from a strong lateral branch of the tree, his toes swinging hidden in the long grass, was the figure of a man.

No pleasant spectacle in the red tropic sunset. A beruffled adjutant bird, standing in the water of the river, faced these rough and ready gallows with an expression of the utmost dejection, until he flapped his wings, stretched his neck and took to flight before the approach of the intruder.

When Seton had cut the poor devil down, a rapid examination satisfied him on two points—this was a white man, and he was still alive. He was wearing a very dirty drill coat that had once been white, now saturated with perspiration both under the arms and around the stiff upright collar.

Seton loosened this collar and then examined the pockets, in which he could find nothing, neither money nor arms nor anything to disclose the man's identity. He had no wound upon him. If that shot had been fired at him, the bullet had missed its mark.

First-aid attempts at artificial respiration had little result. The pinched, sunburned face twitched once or twice, but the white staring eyes were still glazed as by a film. Seton noticed those eyes and knew what they meant—opium, *chandu*. Some philanthropist had taken it into his head to string up a morphinomaniac.

Seton hoisted him over a shoulder and began to carry him up the hill. The fellow did not weigh much. He was very thin. His body felt warm and clammy.

It was dark by the time they got to the little rattan footbridge. In the bungalow Ah Ho had lighted a lamp. The Cantonese appeared at the head of the steps.

"Have dead?" he asked cheerfully.

"No," said the other. "We'll pull him round in a minute."

"Gobble pigeon too plenty cooked," said Ah Ho.

Seton, ignoring this, passed through into his bedroom where he laid his burden down upon the camp bed. He unfastened the coat buttons, to discover beneath a threadbare flannel shirt a brass Chinese coin about the size of a Mexican dollar. This thing, whatever it was, was attached to a cord of plaited horsehair around the man's neck.

Seton cut the cord with his knife and threw the coin on the dressing table before he got to business. He massaged the man's neck which was all red and swollen, worked the arms and rubbed the legs to restore circulation, and moistened the lips with brandy.

He noticed that the man was quite young and, had he been in a fit state of health, would have been uncommonly good-looking. In spite of his extreme thinness and the shabbiness of his clothes, with his regular features and crinkly black hair, brushed straight back from the forehead, he looked rather like a cinema hero. Even as he lay there unconscious, there was a kind of romantic appeal about him.

Presently Seton thought he saw signs of returning animation. He had a medicine case in the next room, but he knew precious little about its contents and could not think of any drug likely to be of use. Then he remembered hot water. He shouted for Ah Ho.

Not a word in reply. Not a sound anywhere, but the tapping of the wings of a great moth against the chimney of a paraffin lamp.

With a glance at the insensible figure on the bed, he went on to the veranda. Outside it was pitch dark, save where he could see the red glow of a big fire through the jungle undergrowth a little way up the river.

Setting off at a run, he discovered Ah Ho, surrounded by half a dozen turbaned Sikh policemen, in the midst of a semi-fictitious narrative in a language of his own invention, the first instalment of which was brought to an abrupt close by the indignity of having his pigtail used as a bell rope.

The sergeant saluted. A camp kettle should be filled with water and placed upon the fire, as the sahib desired. As soon as the water was prepared, two of his men should carry it to the bungalow. It was an order. The sahib should be obeyed.

None the less the sahib thought it best to wait until he had seen the camp kettle actually on the fire. Then with Ah Ho he returned to the bungalow, where in his so-called dining room, on the little folding table, the aforesaid "gobble pigeon" reposed half buried in billows of rice, where it looked rather like a battered, foam washed wreck stranded between Scylla and Charybdis in the shape of a bottle of whisky and an aluminum jug of filtered water.

Seton went straight through into the other room where to his amazement he discovered the bed was empty. There was no one there.

It took the police officer only a few minutes to search the little four-room bungalow. He even took the trouble to look under the *attap* roof where he disturbed a snake, a nest of rats and scores of lizards. An example of the divine economy, Nature's beautifully adjusted precautions to curb super-fecundity in a climate where the damp heat bred vermin of all kinds—the lizards ate the mosquitoes, the rats ate the lizards and the snakes swallowed the rats.

But that did not help him. He was no wiser than he had been. The man whom he had carried into that bungalow but a few minutes before was certainly gone. Vanished.

Ah Ho went down to the camp and returned almost at once with the news that he was not there.

"Where him gone?" he asked.

"How the devil should I know!" Seton exclaimed.

Ah Ho nodded.

"Miracle work," said he. "No like."

Pulling up a chair to the table, Seton savagely dug the carving fork into the

broken breast of the turkey. He ate hungrily, occasionally knocking a moth away with the blade of his knife, while Ah Ho stood by, expressionless.

Try as he might to find some sort of explanation for what had happened, he could not account for it. You could not put it down to bad manners; and it was out of the question for an officer of the Malay police to accept, even unofficially, Ah Ho's solution—miracle work.

CHAPTER II

THE *LING-TSIEN*

IN A WAY, Seton welcomed the incident. He was glad to have something to occupy his thoughts. He found himself up against a proposition entirely novel to his experience, and that in itself did a lot to relieve the monotony of Sungei Kalan.

It was possible, if very improbable, that some one had entered the bungalow and taken the man away during his brief absence at the police camp. Just as unlikely that the fellow should have revived and gone off on his own, because it was difficult to think of any conceivable reason why he should have done so.

The poor devil must have been strung up by some of the Krapoh people, and in any case he had been found over the border. Hence it was no business of Seton's. None the less he could not help being interested. His only regret was that he could not take the matter up officially.

The next morning he walked down the jungle path to the clearing and had a look round, but could find nothing in the way of a clue. There was the rope in two pieces, the greater part of it still tied to the tree—an ebony tree by the look of it—and the slip knot at the shorter end was lying in the *lalang*, just where he himself had thrown it after he had cut the man down.

The grass between the tree and the path had been trampled by many pairs of feet. Among these he managed to identify at least one pair of particularly big and heavy boots. That probably meant Hochheimer himself, hunting a pearl thief and taking the law into his own hands as he was more or less free to do on that side of the border.

Seton returned to the bungalow, realizing that he could do nothing, resigned to a policy, dead against his nature, of letting sleeping dogs lie.

That did not mean that he could put the business altogether out of his head; and as a matter of fact, in quite a literal sense, it was he himself who proved to be the dog who was not allowed to sleep.

Life in the jungle had made him cautious, and he never got into bed without making sure that his loaded revolver was under his pillow. On the fourth night after the man whom he had found in the jungle had disappeared, he was suddenly awakened by a dim light in the room—a sense of indefinite danger.

He never moved; he just opened his eyes. It must have been about two o'clock in the morning. He felt as if he had been asleep some time, though there was no sign of approaching daybreak through the open windows.

Through the gauze of his mosquito net he could see some one standing at the chest of drawers upon which stood the looking glass. This man was a Japanese. And there were no Japanese within ten miles' radius of Sungei Kalan; nowhere nearer than the Farsari Rubber Estate at Kwala Tasat.

Regarding the intruder from under lowered eyelashes and breathing regularly as if he were still sleeping, the police officer considered the disadvantages of a mosquito net on occasions when it was necessary to get out of bed in a hurry. Very gradually, an inch at a time, his right hand was moving under the pillow.

A particularly unprepossessing little Japanese. He had stiff wiry hair, dirty protruding teeth, bloodshot eyes and a great scar across his left cheek that looked like an old sword cut. He was dressed in European clothes, a suit of Chifu silk that had evidently been made for somebody else, though his feet were shod with Japanese *zori*, or sandals.

With a small bull's eye lantern in one hand, he was opening one drawer after the other and going very carefully through the contents. Seton could see his face in the mirror before which lay a revolver. From time to time he looked round cautiously toward the occupant of the bed.

Seton began to break out into a gentle perspiration. He had been able to assure himself of a somewhat disconcerting fact. His revolver was gone. That was it on the dressing table. Not a bad bit of work, when the police officer was a light sleeper and the mosquito net had had to be pulled out from under the mattress!

Then, at last, Seton saw what the fellow was after, and the discovery gave him food for thought, though he had little time just then to bother about an explanation. In the middle drawer the Japanese had found the little Chinese brass coin.

Since it had been in his possession, Seton had thought a lot about that coin. As he was unable to read Chinese characters, he had asked Ah Ho about it. According to Ah Ho the coin was known in China as a *ling-tsien*. It had a written charm on one side, and on the other a mandarin's seal; and no man with such a powerful talisman in his possession could suffer harm from fox devils, witch weasels, the five deadly animals or any evil spirit. The kind of thing any superstitious Chinese might carry about with him, but a strange thing for a white man to have, and a stranger thing still for a Japanese thief to be after.

The thief was now standing at his full height, which did not amount to much more than five feet two. That made it easier for Seton to see his face in the looking glass. He seemed mightily pleased with himself, for he was grinning from ear to ear, displaying his dirty teeth, one of which was broken. Holding the *ling-tsien* in his left hand, he was examining it in the light of his bull's eye lantern.

Indeed, at that particular moment he was giving more attention to the magic coin than the security of his position warranted. For he was in the middle of his inspection when Seton crept under the curtains of the mosquito net and, flying at him like a terrier, caught him by the throat.

Down they came together on the floor, causing the little rickety bungalow to shake so violently that there was a scuttle of rats on the canvas ceiling under the *attap* roof. The police officer, who knew the strength and agility of the average Japanese, was quick to keep the advantage he had seized. As he fell, he snatched his own revolver from the chest of drawers and, with the quick cross-counter of a man who has learned to use his fists, he cracked the pistol with all his force behind the fellow's ear.

It must have knocked him out for a second, for he went rolling across the floor like a woodlouse and, in so doing, loosened the grip of his fingers on the little Chinese coin. But he was on his feet in an instant and, as Seton yelled at him to hold up his hands, dived into the other room. A bullet flew past his head as he took the bungalow steps with a jump; and a moment after he was running like mad along the path upon the river bank.

Seton's men, who had turned out at the alarm, followed the fugitive as far as the border. Beyond the frontier post they dared not go; and as they might as well look for a needle in a haystack as a Japanese thief in the Malay jungle at dead of night, nothing more could be done till daybreak.

Seton lighted the lamp and a cigar and picked up the brass coin from the floor. It looked as if the thing were worth something. Anyway the Japanese had put himself to a great deal of trouble and run considerable risk to get hold of an apparently worthless trinket that had once belonged to a white man. Any one with less knowledge of the Malay Peninsula would have been just as puzzled and interested as Seton.

BEFORE the morning parade the police sergeant had a report to make. He had obtained information from the Malay village where a long haired Tamil girl was obliging enough to deputize for the per-

fectly good fat wife he had left in Amritsar. The Japanese had come upstream and he had gone downstream again—in a canoe of a kind not often seen in that part of Malaya.

That looked like Krapoh. The canoe was of the type Seton had seen in Timor. More curious than ever, he began to wonder whether he could now take up the matter officially without being hauled over the coals. He could not very well go down to Krapoh himself, but he might send Ah Ho. On occasions Ah Ho was invaluable. In many ways he was a better police agent than a personal servant.

Later that morning Seton went to have another look at the ebony tree—and got the shock of his life. He pulled up stone dead on the edge of the clearing and stood damning his own eyesight in such forcible language that he shocked even the adjutant bird—and the species is known to be without morals, manners or decency. The old fellow gave Seton one look, shook his feathers like a wet dog and departed with a scandalized screech into the forest —with little of his usual dignity.

For the ebony tree was still occupied, and by the same man as before. From the very same branch, a skeleton dressed up like a scarecrow dangled above the narrow leaves of the *lalang*.

A grim sort of practical joke. There was no mistaking the man's clothes. There was the crumpled white duck coat with the buttons undone in front, displaying a breastbone and ribs almost devoid of skin or flesh. Why, it looked as if the confounded fellow had deliberately gone back and hanged himself—just to spite Seton.

Seton realized that he was now on dangerous ground. This murder had been committed in the territory of the Sultan of Kedah. Even the Siamese would have to take steps, though such steps would not lead anywhere. That, at least, was a certainty.

That night, smoking a cigar on his veranda, Seton did some good solid thinking, the kind of analytical reasoning that had already made him a marked man, that had decided the Governor of the Straits Settlements to select Arthur Benjamin Seton as the special intelligence officer for the whole of Malaya.

That afternoon he had been carrying out investigations and had already formed an opinion, an hypothesis that might prove right or wrong. He had been down to the ebony tree; he had measured the skull, the distance between the cheek bones, and he had made one or two other important discoveries that for the present he thought it best to keep to himself.

It would certainly be advisable for Ah Ho to go down to Krapoh on absence without leave. That could be worked all right, unofficially. Ah Ho could be trusted to find out what he could without giving himself away.

CHAPTER III

THE JOHN COMPANY

THE CHINESE was absent five days, and when he got back to Sungei Kalan he found Seton alone with his coolie, the police in the meantime, in accordance with orders received from headquarters, having marched down to Penang; while the officer was only awaiting the return of his henchman to pack up and leave the bungalow to the wild cats and the lizards.

Krapoh, it appeared, was a little sink of iniquity, built of bamboo and roofed with *attap*, where the decadence of the East had been stimulated into a semblance of life by the worst vices of the West. Hochheimer was there with a few Siamese officials, living in a big bungalow at the mouth of the river, alongside which a coconut tree had been decapitated to do duty as a flagstaff.

Ah Ho described him excellently, though in his own pidgin English, as a big darkish man with hair all over him, except on the top of his head. He went about with bare legs, trousers rolled above the knees and the sleeves of his shirt cut short at the elbows. He had a Burmese girl for a housekeeper and was reported to have

consumed enough beer to float a junk.

His oyster divers, most of whom had come up from Timor, had more money than they knew how to spend; and as there was neither law nor order in the place, a drinking saloon of the most disreputable kind, run by a compatriot of Ah Ho's, was doing a roaring trade.

The fact that Hochheimer's divers were Malays from Timor, who may have learned their job down at Fort Kennedy on Thursday Island, was evidence in itself. It was one of their canoes in which the Japanese had come upstream. The man should be easy to trace, as he had a scarred face and a broken tooth, and Ah Ho had not failed to find out something about him.

His name was Komai, and for some time he had been going up and down the coast in a flying *proa*, probably to and from Singapore, though the Chinese could not be sure of that.

"And is this chap Komai one of Hochheimer's friends?" Seton asked.

Ah Ho shook his head emphatically.

"Them belong enemies," he replied. "Japanese man him only come ashore night time."

"And is he there now?"

"No have saw *proa*. 'Spect him gone Singapore-side nowadays."

"And what about Hochheimer?"

"All time make bobbery. No. 1 size man make too plenty shout. Him say thief men come take him pearls."

"And what's he doing about it?"

"All time too much foreign drink. What time I have saw German mister Ah Ho plenty afraid. All same orang-utang. One China man speak me him one time go Singapore-side catch 'em Komai."

"Very likely," said Seton. "And was it Hochheimer himself who came up here and strung up that fellow on the tree?"

"Yes, master. Him velly glad that man have dead."

Seton gave a kind of grunt that might have meant anything.

"Did you find out who the other man was? Anything about him?"

"Some name all same Mister Ah Ken. Maybe Ah Tsien. My no savvy."

"Can't place that," said the police officer. "But a name doesn't matter a lot. And what did Ah Ken, or Ah Tsien, find to do with himself when he was down in Krapoh?"

"Maybe him buy pearls," Ah Ho suggested.

"Why, the fellow didn't look as if he had two cents to rub together," Seton exclaimed.

"I think him belong company. *Tong*. All same *Ti-hsiung* pidgin."

"And what the devil's that?" Seton asked.

"All same bunch of brothers, master. No. 1 man called *Lao-ta*. Every one do what him speak. Have got all same thing China-side, plenty places."

"I see," said Seton. "Kind of secret society, eh? And do you mean to say that that white man I brought here belonged to a *Ti-hsiung*, or whatever it's called?"

Ah Ho gave his master a furtive, comical look.

"Them people bottom-side called John Company. All same John Chinaman. John Company," he repeated.

"Man alive, that's what they called the old East Indian Company more than a hundred years ago. I suppose the *Lao-ta*, or head of the show, thinks he's another Warren Hastings?"

"My no savvy that man," said Ah Ho very seriously. "And nobody savvy this *Lao-ta*. Him plenty clever inside, I 'spect."

"Then how do you know anything about the concern he runs?"

The Chinese smiled complacently. Not without a sense of the dramatic, he had reserved his trump card till the end.

"That magic coin not good joss so much," he observed. "Mandarin's seal belong John Company seal. All kinds of men look see that, they savvy they got orders. Plenty men belong John Company. No. 1 man no can see. No. 2 men have got this piece magic coin. No. 3 men all same coolie men. Savvy?"

"I've got you," said Seton. "A kind of badge of office. It ought to be useful."

"My speak true words," Ah Ho interposed.

"I know that," said the other. "As a matter of fact, we've all heard about this John Company before. I know they've been putting their heads together in Singapore for months about it. Good job I'm going there!"

FOUR days later they found themselves in Singapore, Seton having handed over his Sikhs to the district officer in Penang. He had intended in any case to bring the matter before the commissioner; and on that account it somewhat took the wind out of his sails when it was the commissioner himself who was the first to broach the subject.

"You're in luck's way, Seton," said he. "You've got a job in a thousand."

"What's that, sir?"

"Government intelligence officer—with more or less *carte blanche* to work out your own salvation, my boy. We've pitched on you because of your exceptional knowledge of native languages. The job's no sinecure. There's an uncommon big thing ready waiting for you. There can be no half measures about it. You'll either make good or fail. And if the latter—well, it's on the cards you may not come out of it alive."

"Sounds cheerful," said Seton. "But so far you've told me nothing definite."

"I'm coming to that," said the other. "Ever heard of the John Company?"

Ben Seton made it a habit never to be surprised. That was partly a pose and partly because he had associated so much with Orientals.

"Certainly," said he. "I happen to know a good deal about the John Company."

The commissioner thrust back his chair and stared hard at the man who had been buried in the heart of the jungle for three months.

"The devil you do!" he exclaimed. "And how?"

"As a matter of fact," Seton went on, "I was going to send in an official report concerning certain information that has come to my knowledge up at Sungei Kalan."

The commissioner made a feeble attempt to whistle a tune and, failing hopelessly, lighted another cheroot.

"It has got up there, has it?" said he, as if to himself. "It's a big thing, Seton. There's no doubt about that. So far we've nothing but circumstantial evidence. You can overhaul the records at your own leisure. All I can tell you now is that for some time we have been trying to cooperate with the police in Hongkong and Shanghai. Our suspicions were first aroused by the simultaneous sale in places as wide apart as Colombo and Tientsin of thousands of bogus tickets for the Macao Lottery. Whoever issued them had agents everywhere, and for the most part they got away with the goods. Again, there's a particularly pernicious kind of blackmail going on, and exactly the same methods are adopted everywhere—identical. In a series of murders for no accountable reason we have managed to trace an extraordinary similarity in certain salient points. In Singapore alone this would never have been noticed; but when you hear of the same thing from Perak, Selangor and Malacca, all tallying with reports that have come down from the China coast, well, it's about time to sit up and take notice."

The commissioner struck his writing table with a clenched fist.

"There's no doubt about it, Seton," he went on. "This is a going concern on a large scale, a kind of general merchant's business in all sorts of crime from petty larceny to murder, and the man at the head of the thing has the brain of an organizer."

"I take it your local men will give me all the help they can?" Seton asked.

"Naturally. Come to us for any information you want."

"I don't think I'll want much," said the other, "once I get off the mark. There's a German called Hochheimer who may come down from Kedah. I should like to know when he turns up."

The commissioner gave a smile of satisfaction as he wrote down the name.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm looking out for a Japanese. I believe his name's Komai. Identification dead easy; sword cut on left cheek and a broken front tooth."

"Right. Is that all?"

"Nothing else for the present."

"Very well. I'll pass that on to the superintendent. He'll help you. So long. Hope it'll turn out all right."

"Not the least reason why it shouldn't," said Seton as he strolled out of the room.

As a matter of fact, assistance of the local police was altogether superfluous as far as Hochheimer was concerned. The man blew into Singapore one evening like a tidal wave. He swept along the waterfront from Tanjong Pagar, sweating profanity under a solar topee as big as a small umbrella and fetched up in a cane chair on the veranda of a private hotel facing the cricket ground, where he shouted loudly for beer.

In three days all Singapore knew all about his business and where he had come from. A kind of modern Pantagruel with an abnormal appetite—a dangerous proclivity on the equator—an unquenchable thirst and a voice like the Cretan bull. Nor had Ah Ho been much wide of the mark when he had described the man as bearing a remarkable physical resemblance to an orang-utang. For he was all whiskers and wrinkles, with gigantic arms and a brick red, apoplectic countenance that made his watery eyes look even bluer than they were.

He declared that he had come from a place called Krapoh—of which no one had ever heard—to wring the neck of a Japanese called Ando Komai, concerning whose misdemeanors he officially reported to the police. Also, he wanted experienced pearl divers whom he thought he could get from Borneo.

He stood for blood and iron in white ducks, and dropped more than one hint that he had already dealt in a very effective manner with an opium drugged white man who had gone native, who had tried to doublecross him; and he was going to serve Mr. Ando Komai in much the same manner without help or by-your-leave from the local police.

That was Hochheimer; and if—as the German proverb has it—a man is what he eats, his violent temperament may be put down to high blood pressure and strong waters. Having gorged himself to repletion and tossed down two or three liqueur brandies to lay the foundation of a new thirst, he lay stretched at his great length upon a cane chair on the veranda of his hotel. That day was the second of his visit to Singapore, and he had an experience that afternoon that might have shaken the nerves of one less imperturbable than himself. In reality he lacked imagination. His outlook upon life was obscured by the shadow of his own gross personality. At once radiant and somniferous with alcohol, he surveyed the scene before him.

The level grass of the cricket ground between the roadway immediately in front of him and the esplanade where a line of palm trees stood forth against the moonlight on the sea; a long rank of rickshaw coolies waiting patiently for fares, each seated on the footboard of his little vehicle; the passing traffic—the East by lamplight—men from the four corners of Asia in cart, gig and rickshaw, with bare feet or shod, wearing topee, turban, kimono, sarong.

He became suddenly aware of the presence of a stranger, a dapper little man in a very clean white suit, who bowed. He had reddish curly hair, the dried up complexion of a man who has lived for many years in the tropics, and a rather long, pointed nose.

"Herr Hochheimer, I believe?"

CHAPTER IV

HOCHHEIMER

THE GERMAN, with his blue vacant eyes round as saucers, stared hard at Seton.

"Vot your business—er?" He ended with a loud grunt, as if his visitor had hit

him clean and true in the windbag.

"Just a friendly talk," said Seton casually.

Hochheimer grunted louder than before.

"These friendly talks I not like so much," said he. "B'raps you tell me your narme? Vos besser I know that, before we gommence der friendly talk."

"Seton," said the other. "That may convey nothing to you; but quite recently we were neighbors, so to speak. When you were down at Krapoh, Mr. Hochheimer, I was only a few miles away, just over the border at Sungei Kalan."

"*Ja.* I know vell that blace. I gatch thereabout a darmned swine dog vot gome steal my bearls. I opstring him to a dree."

"An ebony tree, I believe."

For the first time Hochheimer looked interested. He even bestirred himself in his chair, lifted himself upon his elbows into a more comfortable position.

"Ha, you know that dree? B'raps, you see mit your own eyes my liddle handivorks? I also. Und ven I see him, mein Gott, there vos nothings but bones. Der ants haf' eat all der rest. Und vy? Because he one time steal my bearls, therefore he vos now dead—der most dead man in all der gontinent of Asia."

"I suppose, Mr. Hochheimer, you're quite sure of that?"

Seton asked the question with a certain amount of emphasis.

"I see, I tell you. Mit mein eyes."

"Well, if you're satisfied, well and good. From all accounts, Mr. Hochheimer, you appear to have had a narrow escape this afternoon, if what I have been told is true?"

"Eggscape! Der darmn' fool rigshaw goolie. But how you know?"

"I happen to be connected with the police."

"You vos of der b'lice, er? I haf' seen der b'lice, but they vos no goot. All der same, you make suggestion that liddle business was not agcident?" the German asked, astonished.

"It is quite possible. I understand your rickshaw coolie suddenly left you high and dry in the middle of the road. At that moment a high wheeled gig dashed round the corner and crashed straight into you and, if you hadn't jumped out in the nick of time, you would almost certainly have been killed."

"Und as it vos," Hochheimer took him up, "I miss der shafts by von inch—von liddle inch. Und der rigshaw goolie vanish like smok'. Goot job for him, I tell you."

"I'm not so interested in the coolie as the man who was driving the cart. Did you happen to see what he looked like?"

"I haf' not time so moch to look," Hochheimer replied. "A Shinaman, I see only that, when der gig vos round der gorner."

"I see," said Seton. "Well, Mr. Hochheimer, I've come here merely to warn you, if you'll take what I say in good part. If you remain in Singapore, there will probably be a repetition of this incident. In other words, the same sort of thing may happen again—and the next time you may not be so lucky."

The German burst into laughter.

"Soch liddle things not frighten me," he exclaimed.

"No question of your personal courage," Seton persisted. "We understand you've had certain difficulties up in Krapoh and have come down to Singapore to find pearl divers whom you can trust."

"So. Tomorrow I gall upon a Shinese merchant in this blace of der name Hip Wing. You know him, *ja?*"

"Certainly," said Seton. "Everybody knows Hip Wing. One of the most prosperous merchants in the place and the head of the Chinese community. Though he has now practically retired from business, there's a branch of his firm in Borneo. No doubt he will be able to help you better than any one else."

"*Ja.* He lif' at Tanglin by der Botarnic Garten."

"Yes," said Seton. "But off the main road. The road to his house runs through jungle."

"If you vos at Sungei Kalan," said

Hochheimer, "you must know der Botarnic Garten vos not der jungle."

Seton shook his head.

"It's your own risk," said he.

"Risk! Vot risk that Hip Wing tell me about der Borneo bearl divers und gif' me introduction brief for his agent at Brunei?"

Hochheimer had flared up. His hirsute countenance actually seemed to bristle all over.

"You vont to mak' me der goot riddens; er? You not vont me in Singapore?" he demanded.

"On the contrary," Seton retorted, "it would rather suit my book if you stayed, though it might not be worth it from your point of view."

"Leaf mein boint of view to meinself," Hochheimer exclaimed. "Here I vos und here I stay, ontil I shoose."

Seton held out a hand.

"So der friendly talk is finished," Hochheimer announced. "I vish you der goot efening."

Seton left the hotel highly pleased with himself and—if the truth be told—a little ashamed that he was. Hochheimer was riding for a fall. He had not even bothered to ask a few pertinent questions. He had just ridiculed the whole idea. Well, it was ten to one he would have to take the consequences; and for that very reason he might prove tempting bait, like a chunk of pork on a shark hook. He would not feel complimented if he knew it; but that is how Ben Seton looked at it, and why, at an early hour the following morning, the police officer whiled away the leisure hour in the deserted cricket pavilion which was not fifty yards distant from Hochheimer's hotel.

SEATED in a chair with his legs on the scorer's desk, the government intelligence officer appeared to be giving the whole of his attention to the Malay groundsman who was rolling the pitch, but never for long did his eyes leave the veranda of the neighboring hotel.

He saw Hochheimer appear like a giant refreshed. The German stood at the top of the steps with his legs wide apart, his great solar topee well on the back of his head, and hailed a rickshaw.

Seton missed nothing of the comedy enacted by some half-dozen rickshaw coolies. There was no question among rival competitors in the rickshaw trade of being first on the rank. A client had only to hie one of them, for the whole crowd to make a rush at him like a charge of Bashibazouks. It was a case of first come, first served; and the man who could get quickest off the mark got the most work and the most opium and was the first to die of heart disease.

The coolies, the wheels of their vehicles grating one against the other, had reached the middle of the road, when a Chinese—who had been giving a tame bird an airing under the trees—snapped out a few words that Seton failed to catch. Though he was a benevolent looking old gentleman with a gray goat's beard and tortoise rimmed spectacles, his voice was rather like the bark of a quarrelsome small dog. It frightened his bird—a white Java sparrow—that flew up into a tree, to be hauled back by the silk thread attached to its leg—and it had a surprising and instantaneous effect upon the rickshaw coolies.

To a man they pulled up, and with unusual docility, though grumbling, walked their vehicles straight back to the rank; all except one man who differed in no essential particulars from his fellows, save that his rickshaw was, perhaps, better upholstered and newly painted.

And into this particular rickshaw blissfully stepped the Krapoh pearl king. Sprawling back in the seat, he was wheeled off round the corner toward the native quarter where the Tanglin Road comes into the city, to be followed by Ben Seton in a rickshaw that had been waiting for him behind the pavilion, drawn by a coolie he knew he could trust, who had already received his instructions.

It was easy enough to keep the German in sight, and there was precious little chance that he would condescend to look round. In those days that road was not the busy and populous thoroughfare it is

today. The residential part of the city spread northward for a good many miles, and every hundred yards or so there was the gate of a drive leading to a bungalow that was hidden among the trees of a spacious garden. There were places, however, where valuable freehold properties were advertised for sale that were nothing but virgin jungle, the clearing of which would cost the purchaser hundreds of dollars before he could think of building.

About three miles outside the city Hochheimer's rickshaw coolie turned to the right into a lane that was more like a tunnel than a roadway. The branches of gigantic trees met overhead, shutting out the sunlight, while the undergrowth consisted of a wilderness of bamboo and *sapang* intertwined with creepers.

Seton's coolie, obedient to his instructions, kept the other rickshaw in sight, and so quickly did the thing happen that, although he was on the lookout for trouble, Seton was taken by surprise.

When the German's rickshaw was not a hundred yards from the main road, the coolie suddenly and without warning pulled up stone dead, hurling the shafts of his vehicle upward, over his shoulders.

Hochheimer was no lightweight, and moreover he had been lying well back in the seat. His great boots flew into the air, and he went clean out over the lowered hood and, had it not been for his solar topee, he might have fractured his skull on the roadway. As it was, he was half stunned; and before he could make an attempt to get to his feet, or even swear, there came the sharp report of a firearm from the thickets and a bullet smashed through the woodwork of the rickshaw under Hochheimer's knees.

As Seton was rushed to the scene, the German turned over like a stranded whale and rolled his great carcass clear of the rickshaw. To do him credit, he was not afraid. Snorting like a baited bull, he struggled to his feet. He was winded and surprised, but more than ever was blood and iron in white ducks, which, incidentally, were now plastered with wet red gravel from the road.

Seton, with one glance to assure himself that the German was unhurt, dived into the jungle and disappeared from view. Hochheimer's coolie had already taken to his heels.

THE GERMAN ran his fingers through his thick, untidy hair, as if to make sure that his skull had not been broken. Then, producing a red bandanna handkerchief, he proceeded to mop his face.

"*Donner!* Vot *Schweinhund* haf' done this?"

"Here you are!" cried Ben Seton, parting the bamboos and stepping out into the roadway. "I believe you two gentlemen have met before?"

He held by the scruff of the neck an emaciated, haggard looking man with the features of a European and skin burned brown as a Malay's. He wore no coat, but a shirt that was unbuttoned in front; and he was so thin that the ridges of his ribs were visible.

He had a short clipped black mustache above a weak, good natured mouth. The man with the crinkly hair and the opium eyes! And even then, from the sleepy expression of his face, and the fact that he appeared neither frightened nor angry, it was evident that he was half silly with dope.

Hochheimer stared at him as if he beheld a ghost—and as a matter of fact he actually believed he did.

With a kind of explosion he turned to Seton, at whose captive he kept pointing a finger, as if thus he wished to emphasize every word he said.

"He come from Krapoh!" he exclaimed. "That was der identigal gulprit I opstringen on der dree by Sungei Kalan. I swear der same swine dog vot steal my bearls."

If his expression conveyed anything at all, Seton was slightly amused.

"I suppose you're dead sure about that?" he asked.

"I vos gonvinced."

"And so am I," said the other.

He was listening to the clatter of the

hoofs of a trotting horse, rapidly approaching on the main road from the direction of Tanglin Barracks.

Hochheimer very slowly shook his head. His solar topee was still lying on the ground. He spoke in an undertone, as if thinking aloud.

"But I haf' seen der skeleton meinself. Und der same dree. In Krapoh I know vell this man by sight. How vos it he kom here is beyond my gombrehension."

Seton turned to his prisoner.

"What's your name?" he asked. "You had best speak the truth."

The man, upon whose lips there had been a kind of tranquil smile—a smile that might almost have been that of an imbecile—lowered his eyes to the ground. Drugged though he was, somewhere within him the flame of conscience stung him with sudden shame.

"Aitken," said he. "That's my name. It was. Philip Aitken."

"Nationality?"

"British. At least—once," he added.

"Good Lord!" Seton exclaimed.

"That vos him!" Hochheimer roared. "In Krapoh I hear such a name as that. How comes it he vos not dead?"

"You made a mistake," said Seton. "I suppose you didn't happen to measure the skull. Any ethnologist, you know, will tell you there's a good deal of difference in the cranial measurements of a European and a Malay."

"Vos another man I see mit mein own eyes?" the German gasped, incredulous.

"Undoubtedly."

"But vy?"

With that question on his lips, the big German suddenly flung both arms into the air. For a moment, before he came out with a shriek that must have been audible a quarter of a mile away, his countenance was terrible to see.

Then he just crumpled up. He went down upon the red gravel like an empty sack, and there, clutching his right side with both hands, squirmed and writhed in agony.

Seton, with a quick glance at the jungle, moved toward him; and at that moment the man who had said his name was Philip Aitken seized his chance. Wrenching himself free from Seton's grasp, he crashed into the undergrowth.

CHAPTER V

MR. A. P. DISS

NO MAN can do three things at the same moment. Seton may have found time to curse himself for letting his captive escape, but one glance at Hochheimer assured him that it was the German who needed his immediate attention.

Turning quickly to his rickshaw coolie, he pointed in the direction of the main road.

"Run and stop that gig!" he ordered in Chinese. "Stop it before it gets to the turning—and bring it here."

He stood motionless for a few seconds, looking ruefully at a certain spot in the jungle foliage, the place where Philip Aitken had disappeared, where a branch was shaking and nodding almost as if it mocked him. Then he went down on his knees by the side of the prostrate German who was evidently in the greatest physical pain, for his body was all twisted and he was actually foaming at the mouth.

It took him less than a minute to diagnose the trouble; and as he got to his feet, a Singapore gig, driven by a British officer in khaki uniform, pulled up in the lane. No sooner had the driver reined up than a liveried Malay *syce* jumped down from the back seat and held the head of the pony.

Seton recognized a subaltern whom he had met once or twice in the Club.

"You'll have to hurry, Wilkins," said he. "Here's a job for you; and by the look of it, there's not much time to lose."

The young soldier looked as if he were hypnotized by the sight of Hochheimer's contortions.

"Shot?" he asked.

"Yes—but not by a bullet. It's more serious than that. This is a Sakai blowpipe, and the dart's poisoned. It looks

to me as if it has got him somewhere about the liver. If you can rush him off to the hospital you may be in time to save his life."

"Well," said the other, "I was on my way down to the bank to draw my company's pay; but they can wait. Are you coming too?"

"No. I can't. Your *syce* will have to look after him."

After they had turned the gig round, it was as much as they could do to lift the semi-conscious man into the back seat; and then Hochheimer was driven away, strapped in by the waterproof rug, with the *syce* hanging on to him like grim death.

Seton watched the gig out of sight and then, revolver in hand, searched the jungle on the side of the lane from which the blowpipe had been discharged, in which direction, also, Aitken had disappeared.

He had never expected to find anything —unless it were another *sumpitan* dart for himself. An attempt to follow the trail would be sheer waste of time; he might as well look for a needle in a haystack. In a few minutes he came back to the roadway where his rickshaw coolie was waiting for him.

Giving the man his orders, he was trundled down the lane which led to a white gate that stood open, beyond which the jungle had been cleared. Here were wide lawns of kiss-grass, intersected by gravel walks, the monotony being relieved by ornamental shrubs and specimen trees—an undulating park-like garden in the middle of which stood a large, well built bungalow with an *attap* roof extending over a veranda that was a blaze of color.

At the foot of the wide semicircular steps that led to the front door a magnificent equipage stood waiting—a heavy victoria upon which the black enamel was so bright that it sparkled like silver in the sunshine. Upon the box seat sat a Chinese coachman, and at the head of the pair of coal black Arabs, harnessed in brown leather, stood a Chinese *mafoo* with a horsetail fly switch. Both men were wearing Hip Wing's well known livery—French gray with scarlet collar and cuffs.

Seton found the Chinese magnate seated at a desk writing with an ink brush. Hip Wing extended a hand in the Western fashion to greet his visitor, motioned Seton to a chair and offered him a cigar.

"And in what manner may I be of service to you?" he asked.

He talked almost perfect English. He was an enormously fat man. With his round, gold rimmed spectacles he looked rather like a Chinese Mr. Pickwick.

"I don't want to worry you," said Seton, bowing, "but I understand you were expecting a visit from a German gentleman this morning?"

"That is so," said Hip Wing. "I do not know the gentleman, but he asked a small favor of me, and I am quite ready to give him what assistance I can."

"All the assistance he'll want now will have to come from the house surgeon at the Singapore hospital," said the other. "That's where he's gone. He may be dead already, before he gets there."

Hip Wing showed little surprise.

"Though this is not very pleasant news," said he, "I can not pretend, Mr. Seton, to be greatly distressed. You see, I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Hochheimer."

"To tell you the truth," Seton went on, "I had rather expected trouble. Hochheimer was asking for it."

"Exactly." The Chinese nodded. "Mr. Hochheimer, I understand, was interested in the Kedah pearl fisheries. I knew all about that oyster bed years ago. I might have had it myself."

"And why didn't you?"

Hip Wing chuckled.

"Because the pearls are not particularly good," said he, "and because the Siamese government has no idea of business. By all accounts Hochheimer got the worst of the bargain."

"And thieves for divers," Seton added.

"So I gathered from his letter," said the Chinese. "He asked me if I could put him in the way of getting experienced and trustworthy men. I was quite ready

to do that. When you were shown into this room, I was actually writing a letter to my agent at Brunei, telling him to give Mr. Hochheimer every possible assistance."

"He spoke as if he knew you quite well," said Seton.

"That is not so," said Hip Wing. "I know nothing of Mr. Hochheimer's affairs, beyond what I have told you."

"Then I must apologize for having wasted your time."

"Don't mention it." Hip Wing smiled. "May I give you a lift into Singapore? I am going that way."

Seton declined the offer on the pretext that he had his own rickshaw waiting for him outside. A few platitudes were passed, and then the police officer took his leave.

ONCE again bowling along the broad Tanglin Road, this time traveling back toward the city, he called himself a fool for letting Aitken escape. But he had a plausible excuse to ease his conscience; he had had to attend to Hochheimer.

So far as the German was concerned, Seton was human enough to feel slightly gratified at being proved in the right. By the same token, it looked as if the John Company was essentially a cosmopolitan business on a large scale. It was a Chinese who had tried to smash up Hochheimer in broad daylight in one of the main streets of the city. Both Komai, the Japanese, and Aitken, who according to his own account had once been an Englishman, appeared to be active members of the syndicate. No. 2 men, Ah Ho would have called them.

Hochheimer's rickshaw coolie had, of course, been in the know, to say nothing of the old gentleman on the cricket ground with his pet Java sparrow. And here was one of the wild men of the woods, the aboriginal savage, brought down from the great forests of Pahang or upper Perak, to do the coolie work, as it were, with his blowpipe and poisoned dart. Assuredly the John Company was a prosperous, going concern, superior to racial prejudice, if to nothing else.

The commissioner had been right. It was not the kind of job that would appeal to any one. No one knew better than Seton himself that from this hour forth his life would be in constant danger.

He had purposely arranged that nothing should be said about his new post. Indeed, there were only about three people in the whole island who knew that such a person as the government intelligence officer existed. Before the rickshaw coolie had reached the dusty crowded streets of the native city, Seton's mind was made up.

That very afternoon, so far as his personal acquaintances were concerned, Seton might as well have ceased to exist. He just faded away. It was noised abroad, in the Club and places where men drink and talk, that he had been sent back in a hurry to Sungei Kalan at the back of beyond, though there was another rumor to the effect that he had gone home on leave.

Anyway, that week a new tenant moved into somewhat restricted shop premises in Telegraph Street which had been vacant for several months. These consisted of two rooms on the ground floor, each about seven square yards in area. The front room was conveniently fitted with a counter, narrow teak shelves and a plate glass window. Of the back room nobody knew anything, since the communicating door was seldom open.

The new proprietor proved to be an Eurasian gentleman from India who advertised himself in gilt lettering as:

A. P. DISS
Late Pondicherri
TOBACCONIST

Though he did very little trade, Mr. Diss found it necessary to have a Chinese assistant, as he himself apparently had no intention of giving the whole of his time to business. Nor was it solely coincidence that this Chinese assistant should happen to be Ah Ho, who very freely confessed

to his friends that he found the service of the half-caste gentleman from Pondicherri very much more to his liking than the more arduous duties of personal servant to an officer of the Malay police.

In spite of his laxity, Mr. Diss had the good fortune to secure a regular customer in the person of the superintendent of police, who would drop in occasionally for a packet of his particular brand of Egyptian cigarets. Occasionally, too, he would exchange a word with Mr. Diss over the counter. And on one occasion there took place the following conversation, which is altogether irrelevant to the subject of tobacco.

"Found your man," the customer whispered. "The devil of a job, but we've traced him."

"The bird fancier?" asked Mr. Diss. "The old boy with the Java sparrow?"

"Yes. His name's Song Hwa."

"What's his job?"

"Fruit merchant. Got a godown away out by Kalang Point. Trades in mangoes, durians, mangosteens and bananas. He can nearly always be found in his office."

"And the other man?" asked Mr. Diss. "The Jap?"

"No news of him yet. I'll let you know the moment we get wind of him."

As another client at that moment entered the shop, Mr. Diss began to hold forth upon the merits of a certain brand of Borneo cheroot.

CHAPTER VI

THE CAFÉ CHINOIS

THE teak shelves in the shop of Mr. A. P. Diss in Telegraph Street, Singapore, were certainly well stocked—a circumstance of which Ah Ho, during his master's frequent and uncertain periods of absence, did not fail to take full benefit. For Mr. Diss turned out to be a bit of a gay spark, in a harmless dilettante sort of way. He seemed quite content to leave the management of his affairs to Ah Ho, while he himself saw as much as he could of the sights of Singapore; and one evening, very ornate and pomaded, he turned up in the Chinese restaurant in Malay Street.

That infamous thoroughfare no longer exists. Like the *Yoshiwara*, it has been blotted out from the map of immorality. But in those days it posed as the Montmartre of Malaya—and that's saying a lot. Among its less disreputable establishments were certain shoddy restaurants, such as the Tingle-tangle, where the planter on leave or the second mate of a tramp in the roads might pay a good price for a bad drink, together with the privilege of listening to an indifferent musical performance by three or four plump and pallid Austrian ladies in *decolleté* evening dresses.

The Chinese restaurant had attractions of its own. By the side of the curtained entrance was a red beckoning board with golden Chinese characters meaning "Brotherly Light", and on the lintel in Roman lettering, "Café Chinois". Chinese Restaurant—an invitation to the curious.

For all that, the establishment was seldom patronized by ships' officers and planters, whose tastes do not as a rule run in the direction of opium and Chinese classic harmony—which is no harmony at all, according to Western notions. For Malay Street, too, was cosmopolitan, and in nothing more so than its music. The ears of the would-be reveler were beguiled by melodies, dulcet and otherwise, from the four quarters of the earth. From the Tingle-tangle the strains of zither and mandolins; *samisen* and *koto* from over the way, where the Japanese proprietor stands upon his threshold, bowing to passers-by and sucking his teeth; while a rickshaw passes down the street in which a drunken engineer is doing his worst with a concertina and the "Road to Mandalay".

This may, or may not, have been joy of life in the tropics. It was all in the day's work to Seton, who pulled aside the curtains at the doorway of the Café Chinois and descended the three or four steps into the so-called restaurant, where he was cordially received by the proprie-

tor—a fat Chinese from Anam who had traveled extensively, perfecting his knowledge of the French language in such questionable health resorts as Port Said and Algiers.

The newcomer seated himself at a little table in a darkened corner at the foot of the steps, ordered a drink and expressed disapproval when he found he could get no ice.

Mr. Diss, being well up to time, had leisure in which to observe his fellow guests. He had come to the Café Chinois with a very definite object. That morning the superintendent of police had come into his shop for his usual packet of cigarets, and Mr. Diss—as was natural enough—had passed the time of day with his customer. In the course of a somewhat hurried conversation it had transpired that a Japanese answering a certain description, and calling himself Ando Komai, was not only abroad in Singapore, but a regular visitor at about nine o'clock in the evening to the Chinese restaurant in Malay Street.

One glance had been enough to satisfy Mr. Diss that, though Komai had not yet arrived, there was another man in the place whose acquaintance he had for some days wanted to make.

The majority of the clients of the fat Anamese were well-to-do merchants—the type who come from China with a big coffin and go back after a few years with a small fortune—Oriental merchants as shrewd as they are polite, each with an oily, inscrutable face and a brain like a kind of animated cash register.

Three or four such men were seated at a table under a shallow platform, or stage, at the end of the room, near which was the door that led into the opium divan at the back of the house. Having regaled themselves to their heart's content, they had put away their chopsticks and were now seated, gossiping and smoking. And one of this party was none other than Song Hwa, the fruit merchant, the benevolent old bird fancier with his gray goat's beard and tortoise shell spectacles.

Presently Mr. Diss discovered that he was to be given something in the way of a Chinese entertainment, free of extra charge. On the little stage three sing-song girls made their appearance from behind a lacquer screen. And one of these was E Tsung, which means love and honor.

Seton could not help being interested in E Tsung the moment he saw her. Though a police officer, he was human, and E Tsung was uncommonly pretty—pretty, that is to say, in accordance with Occidental ideas. Her features had nothing of the usual doll-like appearance of the average Chinese girl. They were alive, sensitive, intelligent. In spite of enamel and rouge, she could smile readily and naturally—though, when she thought she was unobserved, her expression became an almost pathetic combination of sadness and apprehension. At such times she would anxiously scrutinize the face of every one who came into the restaurant, and her scarlet lips would part with a suppressed sigh of relief on beholding yet another inoffensive Chinese merchant, bespectacled and corpulent.

But E Tsung was something more than charming and dainty. There were one or two things about her that struck Seton as unusual. For instance, she talked to the proprietor, who was himself a Chinese, in English. That in itself might have meant nothing; but it did not escape the notice of the drowsy gentleman from Pondicherri that E Tsung's English was perfect. She certainly talked the language somewhat pedantically, using quaint, old fashioned phrases, but both her syntax and pronunciation were wonderfully correct.

Unlike her companions, she did not seem to take the slightest pride or pleasure in her occupation—the quaint posturing and shrill treble screeching that passes as Chinese song, proficiency in which it takes the trained artist years to acquire.

To Seton she was like a delicate flower that would soon wilt and die in the fetid, breathless atmosphere of Brotherly Light. In that street of ill fame she seemed as out of place as a bright gem trodden in the

mire. She could have come there only by some strange and tragic mischance; whereas the light hearted, fickle little ladies from Japan in the house over the road were merely making the best of a necessity.

When the song was ended, E Tsung and her two companions came down from the little stage to mingle with the guests, from whom they accepted flatteries and compliments, both given and taken with due ceremony and in accordance with native etiquette. But E Tsung seized the first opportunity to leave the others and seated herself, as if weary, in a high backed chair, though her little oval face became obediently bright whenever any one condescended to speak to her.

Mr. Diss summoned the landlord, for whose convenience he expressed himself in the French language, which he had acquired in Pondicherri.

"That girl over there," he said, "what part of China does she come from?"

"Suchau, monsieur, in the province of Kiang-su, the cradle of song, the home of Chinese singing girls."

"And yet, my friend, she seems not so popular as the others."

"Monsieur, that is not to be wondered at."

"A thousand pardons, but I do not agree with you. She is the prettiest of the three. She has *chic*. In Saigon, no doubt, you learnt the meaning of that."

"Certainly. But E Tsung, though a true artist, is sometimes neglectful of Chinese courtesy. That is, no doubt, because she was brought up in a foreign mission school."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Diss. "And that, also, explains how it comes that she speaks English so well."

At that moment the fat proprietor was summoned to the other end of the room. Mr. Diss had already made up his mind to speak to E Tsung. Indeed, he would have done so then and there, had he not had other fish to fry. Somewhat anxiously awaiting the arrival of Ando Komai, he examined the cheap watch he carried at the end of a heavy silver chain. At the other end of that chain, by the way, was a certain brass Chinese coin with a square hole in the middle and about the size of a dollar.

Even as he replaced the watch in his pocket, he glanced again at E Tsung and observed such an alarming change in the expression of her countenance that it was as much as he could do not to appear curious. For the girl was staring open eyed at the doorway, her lips slightly parted.

Though sorely tempted to look round, Mr. Diss sat motionless, his cigaret between his lips, his expression drowsy, sensuous. He might have been half asleep, half drugged or drunk.

The newcomer descended the steps into the room, stood still for a moment quite close to Mr. Diss's elbow, and then, selecting a small table in the opposite corner, ordered a bottle of brandy.

When a Chinese attendant had brought him an unlabeled bottle that might have contained anything, he tipped out a good four fingers into a tumbler, and then in an authoritative and objectionable manner beckoned to E Tsung.

It was not until the girl had reluctantly accepted his invitation to join him at his table that Mr. Diss half turned in his chair—and set eyes upon the very man who had broken into the bungalow at Sungei Kalan.

THOUGH himself more or less unobserved, Mr. Diss could see as much as he wanted, and it did not take him long to come to the conclusion that he liked the look of Ando Komai no more now than on the occasion when he had met him before. The Japanese looked a dissipated little ruffian who was vainly attempting to conceal the heart of a savage under a veneer of Western civilization—a badly cut suit of European clothes, a derby hat about two sizes too big for him, and a heavy bamboo walking stick that he placed carefully against his chair.

And it was like him, too, to have ordered brandy to drink and to have bought

it by the bottle. He probably did not like the taste of it, and if all he wanted was to make himself drunk, he had more money than he knew how to spend.

They were a strange, incongruous couple; and to the sensitive Mr. A. P. Diss it was not a pleasant sight to see them together. The Chinese girl, who was like a little figure in porcelain or a delicate painting upon rice paper, devoured by those hungry, bloodshot eyes, reminded him somehow of the petal of a flower being destroyed by a voracious caterpillar.

Mr. Diss regarded them sleepily from under lowered eyelashes. He could not catch the drift of their conversation, though he gathered they were talking in English.

Leaning forward with his arms on the table, Komai was at first nothing more than a very insistent and ardent lover. E Tsung never looked at him. She never even looked across at Mr. Diss. She sat there like a figure in wax, staring straight in front of her with a wax-like, vacant expression, apparently conscious of no one in the room.

Soon the brandy brought a patch of color into Komai's yellow face; his little eyes became even more bloodshot. With his broken front tooth and the long scar upon his left cheek, he was no Adonis at the best of times, and just now he resembled a Japanese gargoyle. E Tsung had certainly all the sympathy of the lethargic gentleman from southern India.

Komai was now speaking with great emphasis, with his lips close to the girl's ear. Repeatedly he banged the table with a clenched fist. It seemed alcohol and anger had got the better of discretion.

What he was telling her evidently frightened her. For the first time she looked at him with a startled expression, stared at him straight in the face, incredulous. Suddenly, with a little shriek, she sprang to her feet and made an attempt to leave the table.

But, before she could get out of his reach, he had grasped her by a wrist and pulled her violently back. Mr. Diss could see now that she was terrified. Heated with drink, blind with passion, the Japanese grasped his bamboo walking stick and, before any one could intervene, had converted it into a sword.

"Does honorable miss want to die?" he cried.

He said no more, for at that moment his own brandy bottle flew up to the ceiling and came down with a dull thud on the crown of his head.

The thing had happened in an instant; and no one was more surprised than Mr. Diss himself, who had been on the point of intervening. A man had parted the curtains at the entrance and, taking the steps at a bound, had grabbed the bottle and felled Komai to the floor.

The Japanese may have been dazed, but on the whole he was more surprised than hurt. With difficulty he raised himself upon both elbows, and in that position stared upward at his adversary who stood over him.

Philip Aitken! Mr. Diss, seeing trouble ahead, rose slowly to his feet.

CHAPTER VII

E TSUNG

THOUGH the Japanese absorbed the whole of his attention, Mr. Diss did not fail to observe out of the corner of an eye the stooped and venerable figure of Song Hwa, the old fruit merchant, who had approached from the other end of the room.

On the whole, things were working out very nicely, though there was going to be a roughhouse in a minute or so. For Komai was not unconscious, only dazed, and as soon as he recovered his senses, that man was going to let fly with a vengeance—or Ben Seton knew nothing about the Japanese nation.

Komai may have been a little fellow, but he was uncommonly strong—as Mr. Diss knew from experience—and Aitken could never hope to stand up against him for ten seconds in a square fight, apart from the fact that a half empty bottle is

but poor protection against a sword.

Maintaining a position that was half sitting, half lying, the Japanese was staring at Aitken as if he found it hard to believe the evidence of his eyes. Very gradually the vacant expression upon his face gave way to astonishment, which changed as in a flash to uncontrollable passion.

And a moment after he shot upward, like some kind of human jack-in-the-box. He was on his feet in an instant, before any one could intervene. With his left hand he seized Aitken by the throat, while he swung his sword so high that he brought down a shower of plaster from the ceiling.

His European clothes meant nothing to him now. He was just the aboriginal savage, all out for murder, reckless of the consequences; and had the blow fallen as he intended, there would have been an end to Philip Aitken's misspent youth.

As it was, the languid Mr. A. P. Diss bestirred himself to such good effect that he took Ando Komai not only by surprise, but at a disadvantage. From a position immediately behind the Japanese, he seized the maniac's wrist, at the same time bringing a knee into the small of his back. A sudden violent twist resulted in such a wrench to the shoulder joint that Komai was disarmed almost before he knew it.

He turned, furious, quivering, to stand for a second undecided, muttering incoherent staccato monosyllables in Japanese.

He at once recognized the futility of making any attempt to recover his lost weapon; for there was an air of quiet self-confidence about Mr. A. P. Diss, tobacconist, of Pondicherri, that altogether belied the Eurasian's somewhat effeminate appearance, and which was not without an obvious cause. Mr. Diss held Komai's sword in one hand and his own revolver in the other.

But for the Japanese to accept such instantaneous defeat was a moral impossibility. In spite of the fumes of the brandy, he had enough sense left in his head to give a wide berth to the placid and presumptuous Eurasian. Like a wild cat he flew at Aitken's throat.

The very force of his impact carried everything before it. Chairs flew right and left, the legs of the little table smashed to splinters, glass fell to the floor and broke into fragments—and there, in the midst of the débris, the white man lay stretched upon his back, with his adversary hammering him with the bottle he had wrenched from his hand, until it broke off at the neck.

A human dogfight before a crowd of excited, and for the most part impotent, spectators. Song Hwa expostulated, rapidly removing his tortoise shell spectacles from his nose, lest he himself should suffer any bodily harm. E Tsung had shrieked. The fat Anamese had rushed to the door, fearful that the uproar might attract the police. Having satisfied himself that the law was not represented in Malay Street at that particular moment, he returned to the room, to lend his weight to that of Mr. Diss in an attempt to haul the Japanese away from his opponent, whom he was now belaboring with a fist.

With the assistance of two or three fat and flurried Chinese, they finally succeeded. Komai, breathless and perspiring, his chest rising and falling, was like a mad dog on a chain. He was incapable of speaking in any language but his own, and such words as passed his lips were unintelligible.

It was Song Hwa, the seller of mangoes and durians, who came forward in the rôle of peacemaker, and who heroically, if somewhat nervously, placed himself in front of Komai whom he implored in broken English to control himself.

Oil on troubled waters, that had the desired effect. Komai calmed down by degrees, his spasmodic, heavy breathing like that of a man recovering from a fit.

The old fruit merchant made the best of the opportunity to thrust home his advantage. He summed up the position in a way that would not have occurred to the Japanese, for he was both logical and cautious.

"Maybe the police come," he observed.

"More better you go, I think. You no want plenty difficult questions."

The words seemed to take some time to filter into the man's brain.

"Not good so much this happen," Song Hwa continued, in the same silken tones. "No want too much trouble. More better you go quick, yes?"

He gripped the Japanese by an arm, which he shook impatiently, as if to give emphasis to his words; possibly, it occurred to Mr. Diss, to suggest that he spoke with authority.

Anyway, the Japanese submitted, if with a bad grace. Stooping, he picked up his sword from the floor and returned it to its bamboo sheath. As he passed out, followed by old Song Hwa, he spoke to the Eurasian in a kind of stage whisper.

"Some day I pay back," said he. "I not forget, you see!"

Mr. Diss bowed low and politely and then turned his attention to Aitken.

Poor devil! He looked in a worse way now than on that evening at Sungei Kalan. And yet, even with his face all streamed with blood, he struck Seton as being one of the most pathetic objects he had ever seen. He had gone under so badly; must have lost all caste and pride of race. And he was still quite young, too—he could not have been more than thirty—and with those *chandu* eyes closed, so unquestionably good looking. An educated man—that was the tragedy.

The fat Anamese had taken charge of the situation, his motives not necessarily prompted by sympathy. He merely wished to avoid a scandal.

He ordered two of his attendants to pick up the unconscious man and carry him through the opium divan at the back of the house. Beyond this was a small private room, reserved for influential and wealthy clients, a little windowless cabinet draped with embroideries in which were two couches with a small table between for the usual accessories of the opium smoker.

Stretched at his full length upon silk cushions, Aitken showed no signs of returning consciousness. Mr. Diss, having made up his mind that the man should not escape him a second time, placed himself at the door, where he conversed in an undertone with the proprietor.

The Eurasian gentleman took upon himself all responsibility for the injured man. A drunken Japanese, and what can you expect? He had intervened, hoping to prevent murder.

The very word startled the proprietor. If the man should die on the premises it would mean an inquest, which might result in the loss of his license.

MR. DISS was able to set his mind at rest on that point, and thereby succeeded in gaining his object, getting rid of the proprietor. He found himself alone with the insensible man and E Tsung, the little sing-song girl, who continued her ministrations without seeming to know anything of his presence not a yard away from her.

At last she looked round, showing no surprise at seeing the Eurasian.

"He will be better soon," she said.

"Yes. You've done the right thing. Keep him quiet and let him lie where he is."

"What is your name?" she asked quite suddenly.

"Diss. I have a tobacco shop in Telegraph Street."

"Diss?" she repeated. "Funny name."

"Perhaps I'm a funny man," said he.

E Tsung shook her head.

"I do not think that," she answered. "You have saved Philip's life."

"Are you glad of that?"

"I rejoice," she said, "because I love him. And he loves me, too," she added, as if it were an afterthought.

Her candor was childlike.

"And what do you think of Mr. Komai?" asked the spurious Eurasian.

She made a wry face.

"His wrath was terrible," she exclaimed. "He frightened me so much."

Wrath and *rejoice;* ordinary words, but they both came out of the Bible, via the mission school.

"Would you think me very rude," asked Mr. Diss, "if I asked you a few questions? Will you tell me what Ando Komai said to you that frightened you so much?"

"I wish not to think of him," she exclaimed, setting her painted lips.

"Well, then, let me help you a little. Perhaps I know more about it than you think. He made love to you and you refused to have anything to do with him. How long has that been going on?"

"Not long," she answered. "He came here a few days ago. I have not seen him any time before. He asked me many questions."

"What kind of questions?"

"Who I was. Whence I came."

"Do you know," said the other, "that's just what I should like to know. You see, E Tsung, you owe me something. I saved that fellow's life; and if that means anything to you, you can prove your gratitude by taking me into your confidence."

"That is so." She nodded. "That is true."

"Then, what was the trouble between you and Komai?"

"When Ando Komai first came here he asked for me," she said. "I do not know the reason why he should. I do not know who told him about E Tsung. He asked me questions about who I was, and I told him. Then he wanted to know about Philip, and I said that we would soon be married. He went away then, but he came back next day. He made me talk to him, and when we were talking, he lifted the hair upon my forehead."

Mr. Diss, who had been studying the carpet, looked up quickly.

"Why did he do that?" he asked.

E Tsung shivered.

"It was so strange thing to do," she said, "and it frightened me. Because under that fringe is a birthmark. It has been there for always. How could Ando Komai have known that? I had never seen him before. There were no Japanese in Tang-chau on the Grand Canal."

She wore the usual fringe of a Chinese girl, her black hair cut in a straight line parallel to the eyebrows. By way of proof, she lifted this as she spoke, disclosing a red, star shaped birthmark that would have been a disfigurement had not the prevailing Chinese fashion concealed it.

"Very extraordinary," remarked Mr. Diss. "Very extraordinary indeed. And what did Komai do when he saw that?"

"He seemed content," she answered. "And yet he would not leave me. He talked for long time. I saw that he was beginning to like me. And I was not pleased that he should like me. I wanted him to go away."

"You must understand two things," said Mr. Diss emphatically. "Firstly, I want to help you, both you and the man you say you want to marry. Secondly, I can't help you, unless you tell me everything. It looks as if Komai had known you when you were a child. You must tell me something about your childhood."

"There is not much to tell," she answered. "My father was cook in a mission station at Tang-chau on the Grand Canal. That is between Suchau and the great city of Nanking. My father had become a Christian. But, though he ate Christian rice, he was a wicked man. My mother was very beautiful. She had two children. There was a brother who was older than E Tsung. One night, when I was fourteen years old, my father ran away with me. I tried to shriek, but he had tied a cloth over my mouth, and no one heard my cries except my brother. He tried to defend me. But my father drew a knife and killed him."

Mr. Diss raised his eyebrows.

"Kidnaped his own daughter and killed his own son!" he exclaimed. "I have heard that in China a man can get *ling-chi* for that, torture of the tenth degree."

"The death from a thousand cuts," said E Tsung, burying her face in her hands.

When she looked up she was sobbing.

"And what happened then?" asked Mr. Diss. "Tell me. Don't be afraid, little girl!"

"He took me to Suchau, where he sold me for three thousand taels of silver, and I became a singing girl. I never saw my

father again. The missionaries searched for me, but they could not find me. I heard that my brother was dead. I spent many years being schooled in the art of song and Chinese dance. My instructors were kind to me. I was not unhappy. Chinese people are very kind. I soon forgot all about the mission school."

"How many years were you there?" Mr. Diss prompted.

"The New Year came eight times. I had by then become famous, even among the girls of Suchau who are known throughout all China for their beauty. And I would have been there still, if Philip Aitken had not come to Suchau. He came to that place to smoke opium. What else need I tell you?"

"Did he help you to escape?"

"At first he was very ill, and I was sorry for him. So sorry! I would not have been able to care for a white man, if I had not been brought up by the missionaries. It was very difficult to get me out of that place, because I was the property of the landlord, and I was worth much money to him. But we escaped one night when there was no moon. We went down the Grand Canal in a *sampan*, just Philip and myself. From Shanghai we came here. I had to get right away from China. I have not been here very long."

"Tell me, E Tsung, if Aitken wants to marry you, why hasn't he done so already?"

The girl sighed and looked at the man on the couch who had moved a little.

"Opium," she said. "*Chandu.* You understand? I am sometimes so, oh, frightened for him. He seems always unhappy. He is afraid for something. He will not tell me what."

Mr. Diss nodded as if he understood.

"Let's get back to Komai," he suggested. "When he came here tonight he made love to you? I could see that myself."

"Yes," she answered. "He wanted me to go away with him to Japan. As if I would go to Japan with such a man as that. I think him to be jealous of Philip. When I told him I would have nothing to do with him, he has threatened me. He said there were those in this place who wanted to kill me. Unless I went away with him, I would certainly die. Unless I gave up Philip and went to him, he would kill me himself."

Mr. Diss was thinking. The John Company again! He might be right; or he might be wrong. And, if he was right, for what reason could this mysterious and widespread organization want the life of a Chinese sing-song girl?

Having paused to bathe Aitken's face, E Tsung continued.

"I had been so very frightened, but I was brave when I told him I should better die than have anything to do with such a man like him. That was foolish, it may be, because he had drunk too much brandy and was wrath. He took his sword and I think he would have killed me, if Philip had not come to my help."

Having ended her narrative, she turned away from Mr. Diss and gave all her attention to Aitken.

He had already recovered consciousness, though he made no attempt to move. He lay with his eyes open, staring at the ceiling.

At last raising himself upon an elbow, he gazed hard at the Eurasian.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked, bewildered.

CHAPTER VIII

PHILIP AITKEN

PRESENTING Aitken with a wonderful gilt edged business card, Mr. Diss introduced himself.

"I sell only the very best cheroots," he added.

Aitken looked at the card in a half dazed manner, and then let it fall to the floor.

"And how did you come here?" he asked.

"By the merest chance. All the same, it was lucky for you, as E Tsung will tell you, that I happened to be in the restaurant when you had your little argument just now with Ando Komai."

"You know him?"

Mr. Diss nodded.

"By name," said he, "as I also know you."

Philip Aitken looked disconcerted. He tried to say something, and then lay back again upon the cushions and closed his eyes.

"He is so ill," whispered E Tsung, clasping her hands. "So very ill!"

Suddenly Aitken sat up again.

"I remember now!" he cried, excitedly. "Yes, yes. You were the man who tackled that scoundrel from behind, when he went for me like a mad dog. Where has he gone to now?"

"He left some time ago," said Mr. Diss. "If he does come back, I think, I may have more to fear from him than you."

Aitken leaned forward and spoke quickly.

"Then you had best clear out!" he exclaimed. "Clean away from Singapore! I know what I'm talking about. Your life won't be worth a cent!"

"Indeed," said Mr. Diss, unmoved. "But I do not happen to be particularly afraid of Ando Komai."

"Not him alone," said Aitken, in the same breathless voice. "There are others. Too many for you. I only warn you because one good turn deserves another," he added.

Mr. Diss went to the couch upon which Aitken was lying, at the foot of which he sat down. Taking a cigar case from his pocket, he lighted a cheroot.

"Suppose you tell me the whole truth," he suggested. "Why not make a clean breast of everything? E Tsung has told me her story. I know all about her. I don't like to see a white man living among natives. I don't like to see a white man drugging himself stupid with opium."

"A white man!" exclaimed the other, without the least regard for Mr. Diss's feelings. "Why, you're not a white man yourself!"

The Eurasian looked a little offended. He spoke English with a slight *chi-chi* accent, very precisely, clipping his words short.

"That may be," said he. "Whatever you may think about it, to all intents and purposes I am European." He pronounced the word with the accent on the second syllable. "However," he went on, "pardon me, if I remind you that my ancestry has nothing to do with it. Did I wish to be personal, I might suggest that I have as good a right to call myself a white man as yourself."

The effect of this counter-thrust was exactly what Mr. Diss had intended, for Philip Aitken suddenly burst into tears. He sat there on the opium couch with his knees drawn up, sobbing his heart out, with his face buried in his hands, while Mr. Diss continued to smoke.

E Tsung did her best to console him. She sat down upon the couch by the side of him and, placing an arm around his neck, whispered in his ear.

More than a minute elapsed before Aitken again looked up. This time his teeth were clenched. He looked the Eurasian straight in the face, as if he hated the sight of him.

"You're right, damn you!" he cried. "I've gone to the dogs and I know it."

"The dog, fortunately, is but a short lived beast," observed the philosophical Mr. Diss. "You are a young man still. Why not pull yourself together, for the sake of this girl, if for nothing else? For all you know, I may be in a position to get you both out of the country."

Aitken sat staring at the floor in a disconsolate, dreamy manner.

"Not so easy as it sounds," said he.

"Afraid of the police?"

"Well, they are after me, all right. So you know that, do you? But I could dodge them easily—if I wanted to. I'm not afraid of the police."

"Of whom, then?"

"That's my affair," snapped Aitken.

Mr. Diss got to his feet. He went to the door and closed it, after having satisfied himself that there was nobody in the outer room, except a solitary opium smoker who was sound asleep.

"Let's have the truth," he said. "You're

under orders from somebody, and I want to know who that man is."

"Who told you that?" cried Aitken, alarmed.

"E Tsung has told me her whole story. It's easy enough to put two and two together. You're down and out, as you have said yourself. Why, I don't suppose you've got a friend in the whole island. You can't help yourself, because opium has robbed you of all the will power you ever had. You haven't the physical or moral strength. Now, I've proved myself your friend already. I have saved your life, if it's worth saving. I want one word and one word only—the name of the man whose orders you obey."

Aitken hesitated a moment and then broke down again.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "I can't do that."

Then he looked up again, more frightened than ever, and repeated the first question he had asked.

"Who *are* you?" he asked. "You seem to know a damned sight too much."

"More than I've told you," said Mr. Diss. "Have you ever heard of a place called Krapoh? Who gave you the money to buy pearls from Hochheimer's divers?"

The man tried to struggle to his feet. In spite of E Tsung's efforts to calm him, he succeeded in assuming a sitting position.

"Who told you that?" he gasped.

Mr. Diss ignored him.

"That was a close thing on the road to Sungei Kalan, wasn't it?" he went on. "Uphill all the way, and you were out of breath and nearly dropping with fatigue. It was sheer funk that kept you going. Hochheimer's men on your heels like a pack of bloodhounds, and after your blood and their pearls. Forgotten that?"

Aitken groaned aloud.

"There's a Malay proverb," he said, "that says the trees in the jungle can hear. And curse it, it's true!"

He ended with a kind of breathless sigh, as if all the strength had gone out of his voice.

"Not many men have died and come to life again," said Mr. Diss mercilessly. "I bet you don't know the kind of tree they hanged you on. An ebony tree. I Dare say you didn't notice that. Look here; tell me why you cleared out of that bungalow the moment you came to."

Aitken rocked his body from side to side. He might have been in physical pain.

"A white man's bungalow," he muttered in an undertone, as if speaking to himself. "Photographs. Just like the places I once called home. I couldn't face it! I'm a coward."

"That wasn't the only reason you cleared off," said the other, at last playing his trump card. "You knew you were in the hands of an officer of the Malay police, and you didn't want any awkward questions asked. You knew they would get the truth out of you when they cross-examined you about Hochheimer's pearls. And you were up against a worse proposition than that. You had turned and shot a man and, whether you know it or not, you killed him."

"In self-defense!" moaned Aitken. "In self-defense."

"I daresay. But you didn't want to have to explain things. And I'll tell you why—you knew you couldn't, without giving away your connection with the John Company."

With an effort Aitken got to his feet and stood swaying like a drunken man. E Tsung, in her distress, flung herself down upon the floor. She might have been prostrating herself before a Taoist idol. To Seton the figure of the little Chinese girl was even more eloquent of pathos than the broken, nerve shattered Englishman.

AITKEN made a movement as if he wanted to reach the door, but drew back when the Eurasian held out an arm. Then he lied, palpably and deliberately.

"I know nothing about the John Company," he declared.

"Then why did you make an attempt to murder Hochheimer not two weeks ago? You have strange confederates. What school were you at?"

The man answered like an automaton, as if his toneless voice were the result of some mechanical process.

"Eton," said he.

"Great Scott! An old Etonian and a wild Sakai with a poisoned dart in his blowpipe! If you must commit murder why not do it like a gentleman?"

Aitken sank down again upon the couch and held his hands out in front of him.

"Put them on," he said. "You belong to the police. I might have known it all along. Am I accused of murder? I swear I didn't know what I was doing. Jong-kwo loaded me up with opium."

"Jong-kwo?" said the other, quickly. "I've got that—at last."

Mr. Diss gave a sigh of relief.

"Yes," said Aitken, letting his hands fall between his knees. "I have told you now. It isn't the John Company really. It's the Jong Tong. The natives call it John Company. It's a kind of tradition, I suppose, handed down for generations by word of mouth."

E Tsung had risen to her feet. Flinging her arms round Aitken's neck as if she would protect him, she appealed to Mr. Diss.

"Don't take him away!" she cried. "It's not his fault."

"Don't you worry yourself, little girl," said Seton. "I'm after bigger game."

"But he has killed," she moaned, horror stricken. "Oh, how terrible!"

Mr. Diss shook his head.

"Not this time," said he. "What happened up in Kedah doesn't matter a lot, one way or the other. They had no right to take the law into their own hands and, as he says himself, he acted in self-defense. As for the other fellow, Hochheimer, they've managed to pull him round somehow. The constitution of an ox."

The girl smiled through her tears.

"I knew you were kind," she said. "I knew that when you first spoke to me."

Like a child, living for the moment only, she at once turned to her lover.

"I know now why you tell nothing to your poor handmaiden," she sobbed, laying her head upon his shoulder. "It is for shame that you steal pearls. But so terrible you should try to kill another man. Tell me, if you love me, why have you kept all these things from your E Tsung?"

Aitken folded her in his arms, though he dared not look into her face. Seton could see his thin hands clutching her Chinese dress.

"Oh, E Tsung," he sobbed, "I've tried so often to get away from it all. I swear I wanted to. But Jong-kwo is terrible. Though I want you and nothing but you, I belong to him, body and soul!"

"But now you finish," she cooed, with her lips close to his ear. "Tell me, yes, you finish."

With an effort Aitken half controlled himself. He looked again at Mr. Diss, whose presence in the room he seemed for the moment to forget.

"You're not going to run me in?" he asked.

"No. On the contrary, you have only to tell me where this Jong-kwo can be found and I'll undertake to protect you."

Aitken wiped a hand across his forehead, which had quite suddenly become wet with perspiration.

"If I do what you say," he cried, speaking almost with vehemence, "*nothing* can protect me! The John Company is like an octopus, tentacles everywhere. They're round me now. Death!" he cried. "Death's nothing. I'm not afraid to die. There are worse things than that. Go to that door," he added, in an awed whisper. "Quick. There may be somebody listening."

Mr. Diss opened the door and closed it again, after having looked into the other room.

"No one there," said he, "except a fellow sleeping off the effects of an overdose of opium. No need to worry."

"He may belong to the Jong Tong!" cried Aitken. "He may not be asleep!"

"I lay a hundred to one he is. Anyway, he's well out of earshot, and the door has been closed.

The man shivered as if from cold.

"If I told you what you want to know,"

he said, "they would find out sooner or later. And besides, how do I know I can trust you? You may be one of Jong-kwo's men. There are lots of us, and sometimes we don't know one another by sight. That's how we never know when we're safe."

Mr. Diss, who had finished his cheroot, shrugged his shoulders. He saw that for the time being it was useless. Further questions would only reduce the man to a state of nervous prostration.

"You want time to think it out," he said. "Sleep on it. You had better smoke opium; you're used to it, and it may put some sense into your head. This little woman will help you. She has got her pretty little head screwed on tighter than yours. I'll ask the landlord to let you stay here. If you tried to walk, you would probably collapse."

He picked up the ornate and ostentatious business card that Aitken had dropped to the floor.

"There's my address," he said. "You can find me whenever you want me—the sooner, the better. If you don't, I'll find you pretty quick, I promise you that. But I haven't the slightest doubt you'll see reason before long. *Au revoir.*"

CHAPTER IX

SONG HWA'S GODOWN

IT WAS nearly midnight when Seton got back to the tobacco shop in Telegraph Street. Taking a key from his pocket he opened the door, to be greeted by Ah Ho, who slept curled up like a cat on a mattress under the counter.

"All belong proper, master?" asked the Cantonese, with his habitual smile.

"Good enough, Ah Ho. You may take it from me, we sell up these premises in three days."

Ah Ho nodded pleasantly, though to him the proposal was the very reverse of proper. He did not look forward to renouncing a life of leisure and the luxury of the Trichinopoli cigars he regarded as perquisites, the price of his confidence.

Seton passed into the room at the back, where he lighted an oil lamp. The place was insufferably hot, for it was no bigger than the little private room in the Chinese restaurant where he had left Philip Aitken and E Tsung.

It was a living room and bedroom combined. Upon a cheap deal chest of drawers stood a looking glass, hair brushes and various bottles containing brilliantine and cheap scent.

Mr. Diss was careful to lock the door into the shop before he removed his wig. Then he sat down at the table upon which Ah Ho had placed a plate of chicken sandwiches and a bottle of beer. A heavy blind had been drawn upon the only window, with the result that there was little or no air to breathe.

Things had gone his way from the start. Reviewing past events, he saw that he had to thank Hochheimer more than a little. To the German he was indebted for the hold he had got on Philip Aitken.

As for the rest, it was only a matter of time. E Tsung was on his side, anyway. He had no intention of letting Aitken out of his sight. He would go down to the Café Chinois the first thing in the morning; and before midday, he was fairly confident, he would be on the track of Jong-kwo.

These Chinese concerns were all the same; one man businesses all of them. Once you had clapped a pair of handcuffs on No. 1—the fellow Ah Ho had called the *Lao-ta*—the whole organization would collapse like a house of cards.

Such were Ben Seton's hopeful thoughts as he tumbled into bed like a schoolboy; and in a few minutes he was fast asleep.

But he was not allowed to sleep for long. In less than an hour he was suddenly awakened by a violent banging on the door. Sitting up and striking a match, he heard Ah Ho's voice in the shop, and caught a note of alarm very unusual in his stoical Cantonese.

"Master, come quick! Somebody make plenty trouble!"

"Who is there?" Seton asked, as he

lighted the lamp and adjusted his oily, black haired wig in front of the mirror.

"China missee, master. Malay Street sing-song girl."

A moment later Mr. Diss appeared in the shop, Mr. A. P. Diss, late of Pondicherri, in pink silk pajamas, looking like an Oriental Mantalini.

Ah Ho had closed the street door. Little E Tsung leaned against the counter. Anxiety and alarm had made her painted face look almost haggard, for there were places where the enamel had cracked, and her almond eyes were wide and staring. Her breast, too, rose and fell as if she had been running, though she had come all the way in a rickshaw.

"What's up, E Tsung?" asked Mr. Diss. "Why have you come here?"

She had to take a deep breath before she could answer.

"Something so terrible has happened. They have broken into the restaurant, beaten down the door by force, and they have taken Philip away."

"Who?"

"Komai. What other man but Ando Komai? And there were many with him. Song Hwa and others I have seen before."

She broke down, sank to the floor in floods of tears. Mr. Diss lifted her up, dumped her down upon the narrow counter as if she were a doll and placed both hands upon her shoulders.

"Be brave, E Tsung," said he. "There's a chance yet."

"No hope," she cried, rocking from side to side. "No hope. They murder him. They would have killed him in the café, but they were too much afraid of the police. There were some people there, and they would give evidence, though they were too much frightened to do something to save him."

Her voice was nothing but a series of moans. Seton had the greatest difficulty in understanding what she said. Still holding her by the shoulders, he shook her gently, but firmly.

"Try to think, E Tsung," said he. "I promise nothing, but I may be able to help. Have you any idea where they've gone to?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him for the first time—and her face was almost level with his. "I know that. I heard Komai speak to Song Hwa, when they were carrying him out of the room. They have gone to Song Hwa's godown. But I don't know where that is."

"I do," said the other, quickly. "It's out by Kalang Point. Ah Ho," he ordered, "look after E Tsung. I'll be back in a minute."

He dived into the little room behind the shop, and appeared in a remarkably short time fully dressed in the clothes he had worn that evening, when he went to Malay Street. He had even taken the trouble to find his horseshoe pin of imitation diamonds, as well as his watch and chain.

He came into the shop carrying the paraffin lamp which he placed upon the counter. Taking pen and ink from the little desk where he kept his by no means accurate accounts, he wrote a hurried note, folded the paper and gave it to Ah Ho.

"You had best stay here," he said to the girl. "You don't want to go back to the café at this time of night. In the inner room you'll find a bed and you can lie down. I'm going to lock you in. I'll tell the policeman on this beat to keep an eye on the house."

"You leave E Tsung alone?" she cried, as if startled.

"Can't be helped. You'll be safe enough. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Though she evidently did not like the suggestion, she had no choice in the matter, for Seton turned his back on her and spoke to Ah Ho.

"As for you," he said, "you're to take that note straight to the superintendent of police. You know where he lives?"

"Can catch," said Ah Ho, nodding.

"Then take a rickshaw and go there as quick as you can. Get him out of bed. The thing's urgent. Do you understand?"

"Can catch," repeated Ah Ho.

A moment after, both Seton and the Cantonese were in the street, while E Tsung was sobbing her heart out on Seton's ruffled bed.

AS HE was bowled along the front past Raffles' Hotel, Seton's thoughts were by no means as tranquil as the starry sky above him or the dark oily sea beyond the palm trees to his right. He was inclined to blame himself for having left Aitken alone in the café. At the time, however, it had seemed the wisest policy. To have arrested him on the spot would have been fatal. The man was more frightened of Jong-kwo than the law. On the other hand, it had been out of the question to think of moving him that night.

Seton felt that he had played a wrong card. There was more than a chance that he might lose the game before morning. He knew where he was going; he had found out about Song Hwa's godown; he had even inspected it himself at a safe distance and had had his nostrils offended by the mingled and sickening odor of Chinese garlic and rotten durians. He was bound for the outskirts of Singapore, a place where there was a little natural harbor for small native craft, *sampans* and *proas*, but he could not say for certain whether he was going to come back again.

If he was up against a nasty proposition, it was his own fault; and that was the main reason why he was ready to take the risk. And for E Tsung's sake, too—he thought more of her than Aitken. All the same, he hoped Ah Ho would not be longer about his business than he need.

The rickshaw trundled through a narrow street of dilapidated native houses overtopped by palms. Here was a Chinese quarter similar to that on the other side of the city. It was neither a savory nor a particularly safe neighborhood. Down that side street to the left was Quatremere's gambling den. The flotsam and jetsam of Singapore washed up under these palm trees, the dregs of all Asia.

The rickshaw passed along a narrow lane strewn with garbage, to come out again upon the waterfront at a place where a creek was packed with so many native craft of all kinds and descriptions that only here and there was the water visible—dead water upon which floated a layer of putrid refuse.

Standing by itself was one of those extraordinary buildings that nobody but the Chinese can erect. The place was like an enormous barn, two stories high. It had been built entirely of bamboo and thatched with the dried leaves of the *nipa* palm; and although there was not a nail or a screw in the whole construction, it was capable of weathering a typhoon.

Seton halted his rickshaw coolie and told the man to wait for him out of sight. He then approached the building on foot, hearing voices on the other side of the thin bamboo walls, through which also he could see long vertical shafts of yellow light.

He examined the door before he entered. So far as he could see, it was the only part of the entire building that had been made of solid wood. It was supplied with a strong staple and hasp, though the padlock that secured them was unlocked.

He hesitated a moment and then entered. Closing the door behind him, he stood with his hands in his pockets, in one of which was his loaded revolver.

The scene before him was at once weird and gruesome. He might have been in the jungle at twilight, among the hills at Sungei Kalan. What light there was came from a cheap kerosene lamp, such as Chinese hawkers use, standing upon a wooden crate, and this was but enough to throw grotesque shadows across a room that was wide as a church.

The whole place was filled with a kind of mist hanging thickly under the bamboo joists that supported the floor above —an atmosphere composed of smoke from the lamp and the tainted miasma arising from rotten fruit. The powerful odor of durians and decaying bananas. It was not the smell of the jungle, but something like it; fouler, more poisonous and exotic.

IN THIS great warehouse there were stacks of fruit everywhere between which were narrow, irregular paths, like jungle tracks. And the orange glare of the reeking lamp was like the dull tropic sunset through the forest leaves.

Immediately before the door was a clearing among the packing cases and the piles of pineapples and bananas. A group of men, among whom was Komai the Japanese, stood at the foot of a long bamboo ladder that extended upward into the mist, where the head of it disappeared through a kind of hatchway, connecting with the loft above. But it was not so much the light, the smell of the place and the fetid atmosphere that reminded Seton of the jungle. It was the grim object that depended from about halfway up the ladder that made him think that he was back again at Sungei Kalan.

For there, hanging by the neck, swung Philip Aitken, just as Seton had seen him that evening on the ebony tree by the river. And instead of the morose and despondent adjutant, there was old Song Hwa—another bird of ill omen—with shoulders hunched, his tortoise shell spectacles upon his nose; and he was rubbing his hands together as if he were cold.

Seton was covered. He knew that, and had been expecting it even before he discovered that murder had been done that very night in Song Hwa's godown. For it was all up with Philip Aitken this time. With the rope tied to one of the top rungs of the ladder, they had given him enough drop to break his neck. And somehow or other, Seton thought only of E Tsung, the Suchau sing-song girl.

He might have been no less sorry for himself as he obediently held up his hands before the muzzle of a firearm that caught the light, that looked like a little silver ring suspended in mid-air before Komai's yellow teeth. He could have shot the man first, had he thought the game worth the candle; but it would have meant the end of him a moment after, for every man in the room, except Song Hwa, was armed.

He counted eight of them; Komai and the old fruit merchant, a Malay *syce*—and the rest were coolies, one of whom was a Tamil and another a man of mixed blood who might have been half Dyak.

"Very nice you take trouble to come and see good friends." The Japanese made a sucking noise with his teeth. "Very pleased to meet honorable gentleman who, I think, not go back to Singapore this time."

Song Hwa shuffled up to Seton, tapped his pockets and helped himself to the revolver. Their prisoner disarmed, they bound his hands behind his back, while the old Chinese carefully lowered a transverse iron bar across the door. Having secured this with the padlock he had taken from the outside, he put the key in the pocket sleeve of his robe.

Thrusting Seton into the middle of the room, they made him stand at the foot of the ladder. Apparently by virtue of seniority the Japanese took charge of the situation. He was officious, objectionably polite, and looked uglier than ever.

"I speak you we meet again," said he. "I not think so soon. Therefore you have my many thanks forthcoming. But why you come here just now?"

Seton, who could not move his hands, nodded his head toward the dangling figure overhead in the mist.

"I was his friend," said he. "I came here to save him—too late, it seems."

Komai grinned wider than ever. He had teeth like a horse.

"Honorable friends soon go same place, I think," said he. "But who tell you about this godown, please?"

"That's my affair," said the other.

"So? Excuse me. I not mind so much. Please, why you come Café Chinois tonight?"

"I suppose," said Seton, "I went there because I wanted to."

"Not forget that you make attack me. I think you know too much, maybe. No go that you should be interfering."

"Why not?" demanded the prisoner, almost angrily.

"My business not forthcomes," said Komai, doggedly. "You see that man?

Dead. Finish. Well, mister, that way very good for you also, perhaps."

Turning, he gave orders to one of the coolies to climb up the ladder and untie the rope. He spoke such execrable Chinese that it was all the man could do to understand what he meant.

It took them a long time to make the necessary preparations, which Seton watched with the air of an impassive, almost disinterested spectator. Only once or twice did he speak, and then to tell the Japanese that he would live to regret what he was doing.

Komai, fully occupied with supervising the erection of a temporary and crude scaffold, ignored him. Several heavy crates, loaded with fruit, were moved and placed one on top of the other immediately under the ladder. The slip knot that had been loosened from around Aitken's neck was then placed over the prisoner's head.

The lifeless body of E Tsung's lover had been thrown carelessly against a pile of durians. The man who had been born a sahib and gone native—to end his days in a heap of rotten fruit!

It was not until they were about to tie his feet together that Seton for the first time addressed the old owner of the godown.

"Song Hwa," said he, "perchance advancing years have filled your venerable head with more sense than belongs to our honorable friend from Nippon."

He had spoken in Chinese. Song Hwa adjusted his spectacles and looked at the prisoner askance.

"You know my unworthy name?" he exclaimed.

"Naturally. And I crave a word with you, a word of advice. If you murder me without giving me a chance to say a word in my own defense, before very long you will have to answer to Jong-kwo himself."

Song Hwa was polite enough to remove his spectacles.

"What do you mean by that?" he gasped.

"Would the venerable Song Hwa condescend to look at the watch in my pocket? I should be honored if he would tell me the time."

The old man did as he was told. From the waistcoat pocket of Seton's pongee suit he pulled out Mr. Diss's cheap watch.

"It approaches the hour of the peacock," said he, which meant nearly three in the morning.

"And now favor me by looking in the other pocket, at the other end of the chain."

Song Hwa took a sharp step back and dropped the *ling-tsien* as if it had been red hot. Komai stood staring open mouthed at the round brass coin that dangled from the watch chain. He was too amazed to remember any language but his own.

"You are of the Jong Tong!" he cried. "It was Jong-kwo himself who sent you here?"

Seton, too, answered in Japanese, in which he had an extensive vocabulary, if he fell short in idiom and honorific terms.

"I think there has been some trifling, though regrettable, mistake," said he. "Be so obliging, if you please, as to remove this rope from around my neck, that we may talk as brothers."

CHAPTER X

ANDO KOMAI

KOMAI mastered himself in an instant. He was not the type of man who can be easily frightened.

"Condescend to give explanation," he bowed, drawing in his breath and making a noise between his teeth as if he were cold.

"Excuse me," Seton retorted, "but some honorable explanation is perhaps due from you. Why has this man been murdered?"

He was taking the gamble of his life, and he knew it. A wrong word, a false reference, and the truth would be out, and he would be swinging at the end of the very rope that with nervous fingers old Song Hwa now removed from his neck.

"*Ju-ichiban* was my enemy," Komai replied.

The man's manner was aggressive, sulky, as if he knew himself to be in the wrong and was determined not to admit it. Though his little bloodshot eyes looked crafty, even dangerous, he had already given away, gratis, at least one item of useful information; from the designation, *Ju-ichiban*, it appeared that Aitken's official title as a member of the John Company was No. 11.

Not so much because he found it almost impossible to wrestle with the intricacies of Japanese syntax, as that he had a definite policy in view, Seton suddenly reverted to the Chinese language with which he was more familiar. He purposely intended that the coolies who were present, as well as Song Hwa, should understand what he said.

"When you say that No. 11 was your enemy," he observed, "what you mean is that you were jealous of him, because of a girl."

Komai shifted awkwardly upon his feet.

"In the matter of E Tsung," he asked, "are you in the confidence of—the master?"

"For what other reason would the august Jong-kwo have sent me to the Chinese restaurant this evening?"

"Does the All-powerful think that I might fail to carry out my orders?"

"Jong-kwo never thinks. He knows," said Seton. "The girl is still alive."

This was bold speech, and the man who made it, though he spoke in a loud voice and without the slightest hesitation, was trembling in his shoes.

And all the time he was trying to read Komai's thoughts. The Japanese might be suspicious; already he might have had his doubts as to whether the Eurasian was actually the representative of the man who was called Jong-kwo. On the other hand, if that were so, it must have been quite obvious to Ando Komai that he was in for serious trouble.

"I would have done my duty," he grumbled, "had it not been for *Ju-ichiban*. That is why I have killed him."

"Do you expect Jong-kwo to believe that?" asked Seton quietly. "Instead of seeing that the girl mounted the dragon, you tried your best to persuade her to run away with you to Japan."

That observation had an extraordinary effect upon the Japanese. He drew back a quick step, as if he had been struck, and for the first time was really alarmed. Seton continued, driving home his advantage, speaking not so much to Komai himself, as to the others to whom he looked for moral support.

"This is not the first time you have failed," said he. "If No. 11 got away from Krapoh with his life, that was not due to any help he received from you. And when you were sent up to Sungei Kalan, you were not exactly a success, were you? You certainly found the dead Malay in the jungle that No. 11 had shot. You dressed the body in the right clothes and hung it up on the ebony tree, with the result that down in Krapoh they believed that No. 11 was dead. It was hoped that no further inquiries would be made, and that might have been so, had you not failed miserably in that little burglary business of yours. In fact, far from getting what you were sent to find, you were lucky yourself to escape. Tell me, has the august Jong-kwo told me what is correct?"

Komai's little bloodshot eyes shot furtively right and left. Had the door not been locked and the key in Song Hwa's pocket, then and there he would have made a bolt for it.

He realized now that he was in a minority, that every one of his companions would support the Eurasian. Not one of them would dare for a moment to oppose the will of the powerful head of the society.

He made one last desperate effort to clear himself and, although it was a shot in the dark, it had the effect of shaking Seton's nerves.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "I have never seen you before."

"Does Jong-kwo's right hand know what his left hand holds?" Seton retorted, his heart beating quicker than he liked.

He turned to Song Hwa, adopting an authoritative, impatient manner, in order to retain his own presence of mind.

"Untie my hands," he ordered. "Why should I speak to this man as if I, and not he, were the offender?"

The old Chinese obeyed. With a knife he cut the rope that bound the prisoner's wrists together. Seton had accomplished the first step in his release, but not by any means did he yet feel that he could breathe with freedom.

He continued to speak in Chinese, but now to Song Hwa and in an undertone, though his voice was not so low that Komai could fail to overhear.

"Surely it is not fitting that these men should stay?" he asked.

"I agree," the old man bowed. "Already they have heard too much."

The Japanese might have been a dog that has suddenly caught sight of a particularly juicy bone. It is true his features remained expressionless, but there came a glint of satisfaction into the little eyes which glanced rapidly from Song Hwa to the Eurasian. He could have asked his Shinto gods for nothing better than to be alone with the man who had accused him. He had already made up his mind to escape as soon as he could, and even then he was probably planning how he could manage to kidnap E Tsung and take her with him.

"This matter concerns you and me," said he to the Eurasian. "We are answerable to Jong-kwo."

"That is so," said the other. "But I would prefer that the venerable Song Hwa remains," he added.

The Japanese shrugged his shoulders. He was not worrying a lot about Song Hwa; the old man had not the strength of a child. It was the Eurasian's next proposal that took the wind from his sails.

Seton, nodding his head in the direction of Ando Komai, still addressed the Chinese.

"Do you not see his game, my worthy friend?" he asked. "Our Japanese colleague is no fool. The affair seems to him very simple indeed. All he wants is to get you and me alone, when he thinks he can settle the two of us without much difficulty or danger. Are you ready to take that risk?"

"The goddess of mercy forbid!" cried the old Chinese, throwing up his hands.

"Then give me back my revolver."

With his weapon in his hands it was as much as Ben Seton could do to prevent himself from giving vent to a sigh of relief. It was if the clear breath of heaven had suddenly entered into his lungs, instead of the foul air of the warehouse.

The old fruit merchant went to the door and unlocked it. One after the other the men filed out; and when the last was gone, Song Hwa replaced the iron bar and turned the key in the padlock.

Seton had won. So far as his own life was concerned, he knew that he was now safe. But he could have arrested both Komai and the Chinese at any time without any risk to himself. He had gone to that godown with a definite and deliberate object in view, and all the time—even when he felt as if his life were hanging on a thread—he had been thinking of E Tsung.

He sat down upon a packing case that was filled with mangoes and lighted a cheroot. Song Hwa squatted among the pineapples, unperturbed and seemingly oblivious of the close proximity of what had once been Philip Aitken. The old man had drawn up his knees to his little gray goat's beard and thrust his forearms into the long sleeves of his coat.

As for the Japanese, he leaned against the bamboo ladder in the full light of the lamp and, to give himself an air of self-assurance, he had produced and lighted a cardboard cigaret. He was still confident that he could find some way of taking the Eurasian by surprise. By asking for his revolver the man had proved his hostility.

SETON, not wishing Song Hwa to understand, again spoke in Japanese.

"Condescend the information," he requested, "why Jong-kwo should want the life of a Chinese singing girl."

Komai answered in the sulky manner he had first adopted.

"How should I know that?" he grunted. "Does the great man ever give his reasons. Since by his orders you have been spying on me all this time, you must know that I tried to kill her."

"And would the manner in which you made that attempt satisfy Jong-kwo? I think not. No one but a madman would have drawn his sword in a crowded restaurant before many witnesses."

"To find fault is easy for Jong-kwo who lives in luxury and ease," the other retorted. "It is men like ourselves who have to take the risk and pay the penalty if we fail."

Seton nodded as if he approved.

"There is much truth in your honorable words," he answered. "And it is he, Jong-kwo, you must remember, who gets the bulk of the spoil."

"He is our master," answered Komai. "His orders we obey."

Seton came closer to him, though he held his revolver in his hand. He was careful to let Komai know that what he had to say was not for the ears of old Song Hwa.

"There may be a joint in the armor even of the war god himself," he suggested. "What has Jong-kwo got to do with the Chinese singing girl? It was No. 11 who brought her down from Suchau. He must have told Jong-kwo about her, before you were ordered to go and find her. What did Jong-kwo want you to do?"

"I described to him her honorable appearance."

"And then?"

"He told me to go and see if there was a red birthmark, shaped like a star, in the center of her forehead."

"How did the august Jong-kwo know that?" Seton asked abruptly.

"Excuse me, I do not know," said Komai.

"And when you told him that the girl *had* this birthmark, he declared that she must die?"

The Japanese bowed acknowledgment. Seton went on, speaking almost breathlessly.

"Here may be a chance for you," he whispered. "Condescend to see that this girl may be able to tell us something—something very valuable to know."

"She knows nothing," said the other. "Already I have asked her."

"She would not tell you," said the other. "But she might tell Jong-kwo."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Komai.

"Will you come with me to Jong-kwo tonight?" asked Seton. "Would you dare to confront him with this girl and demand the truth?"

"To Tanglin?"

"Yes. Why should we not show him that we are not mere puppets in his hands?"

The Japanese stared at him in amazement.

"You must be mad!" he exclaimed. "Those well trained servants of his, in their blue-gray uniform with scarlet facings, are all armed. They are there to fool the white barbarians and protect the great Jong-kwo. They thrive and grow fat upon his wealth. We would never leave the house alive!"

Seton was thinking rapidly. Tanglin! And he had known that gray and scarlet livery for years.

And yet he still hesitated to take the final plunge. Indeed, he would never have dared to risk it, had he not held a loaded firearm in his hand, had he not been conscious that he was master of the situation.

"Then return to Nippon," he cried in derision. "Save your own skin and leave me to face—Hip Wing."

At the word old Song Hwa sprang quickly to his feet. Unable to follow the conversation, he had not been listening until the name of the great Chinese magnate had fallen upon his ears.

"That illustrious name we never speak," he cried. "It is forbidden."

The Eurasian gentleman did his best to look ashamed. He could have adopted

no attitude more likely to throw his companions off their guard.

Song Hwa came forward, again rubbing his hands together as if they were cold. He was bent and very feeble.

"I beseech you, be more cautious," he implored.

"Peace be upon you," said Seton in a conciliatory voice. "Let your honorable ears forget what my unworthy lips have uttered."

As he spoke, his left fist shot out with surprising suddenness; the old man dropped like a stone to the ground; and before Ando Komai could move an inch, he found himself staring down the barrel of Seton's revolver.

"The game's up, my friend, and you've lost E Tsung for good. Move an inch and I shoot."

He had spoken in English, in his natural voice, and with no *chi-chi* accent.

Komai was too amazed to utter a word. He might have been turned to bronze.

Still covering the man, Seton bent down and took the key of the padlock from Song Hwa's sleeve. Walking backward to the door, he opened it and then looked out.

"Understand that this place is surrounded," said he, returning into the room. "My man, Ah Ho, has done his part of the job all right. All your friends were arrested as they went out, and by now are probably in the Singapore police cells, accused of being members of the Jong Tong. That company's in liquidation—or will be by tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER XI

JONG-KWO

AT THE back of the little tobacconist shop in Telegraph Street, E Tsung had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion. She was awakened by the ringing of a telephone bell in the outer room; and a moment after, the Eurasian gentleman knocked and entered.

"E Tsung," said he, "I want you to come with me. There is nothing to be afraid of. There are plenty of us to look after you."

"And Philip?" she asked anxiously. "He is safe?"

He did not answer. He just came straight up to her and took her small face between his hands. She was not frightened of him—only of what he said and the way in which he said it, though his voice was kind.

"Poor little girl! We'll see what we can do for you."

He led her into the next room where an impertinent Canton man with a big cigar in his mouth surveyed her critically, and then smiled approval.

And then the Eurasian left her. Closing the door behind him, he entered the other room, where she heard him moving about, opening drawers as if he were in a hurry. The Chinese tried to make himself pleasant to her, but she did not understand his dialect, and besides she was in no mood to talk. All the time she was wondering what had happened. Perhaps the Canton man knew, but she had not the courage to ask him.

And then the connecting door with the inner room was opened again, and a man came in whom at first she believed she had never seen before. She might have thought some kind of miracle had happened, had Mr. Diss had time wholly to remove the nut brown dye with which he had stained his face and hands.

The newcomer had curly reddish hair, instead of Mr. Diss's lank and greasy locks. He was a clean shaven man, wearing riding breeches and carrying a revolver.

"Are you surprised, E Tsung?" he asked, smiling to give her confidence.

"I do not understand," she faltered. "But tell me—about Philip."

"Not yet," he answered. "Not yet, little girl. We've something to do, you and I, something rather important. It's a big thing, and you've got to be very brave."

Without giving her time to say anything else, he took her by an arm and led her out into the road where two rick-

shaws were waiting. Scarcely knowing what she was doing, as if she were dreaming, she got into the first of these, and almost at once the coolie started off at a run into the heart of the city. It would be daylight soon, and most of the streets were deserted.

She looked back and saw that the man whom she had known as Mr. Diss was following her in the other rickshaw. Whoever he was, he had taken charge of her, and she did not much mind. Nothing seemed to matter very much to E Tsung, because she was quite certain by now that something dreadful had happened to Philip Aitken.

They went from one mean street into another—the squalid, rickety houses of the native quarter—and presently came out on the road to Tanglin. She did not know where she was, because she had not been very long in Singapore and she seldom left the premises of the Chinese restaurant in Malay Street.

All the same she was glad of the drive. She had felt faint and tired, and the comparatively cool fresh air of early morning revived her spirits and restored something of her strength.

The broad road seemed to go on forever, mile upon mile. On either side the great trees stood forth against the skylight. But, after the noise of Malay Street that never ceased all night long, after the dust and stifling heat, it was wonderfully peaceful out under the palms. There was nothing to disturb the silence but the grating of the wheels of the two rickshaws. There was not a breath of wind to stir the leaves of the trees. She had ceased to wonder where she was going and what would happen when she got there.

The brief years of her life had made her something of a fatalist—the mission, Suchau, Aitken, Singapore, episodes in the life of a Chinese singing girl. And now this strange man who spoke so many languages and changed his clothes and personal appearance—perhaps she belonged to him? It seemed quite natural to her that she should have no choice in her own destiny. Since she had had to dress like a doll and paint her face, she had forgotten many of the things she had been taught at the mission at Tang-chau. Suddenly her coolie, who seemed to know where he was going, turned from the main road into a kind of lane where it was quite dark. She was a little frightened, until they passed through a white gate, and beyond in the starlight she could see the most beautiful garden she had ever seen—level lawns upon undulating ground in the middle of which stood a great house.

In this house there were many rooms, all of which seemed to be lighted up. There were people moving about on the veranda; and when her rickshaw drew up at the foot of the steps, she could see that these were all policemen who wore turbans and came from India. Armed with rifles, they were posted here and there, like so many sentries. There were twenty of them, at least, as well as one or two white men.

She sat in the rickshaw, not knowing what she was expected to do, too frightened to speak. She had always been a little afraid of these warlike bearded natives of India who would stare at her with a hungry glint in their eyes that made her feel as if the enamel on her face were melting. She was glad her protector was with her. She felt intuitively she could trust him.

He came up to her now, picked her out of the rickshaw, just as if she had been really a doll, and then took hold of one of her hands.

"Come with me, E Tsung," he said. "Do exactly what you are told to do. I'll see that you come to no harm."

She was still mystified and shy. She could not make out why a great bungalow like this should be all lighted up in the early morning. It could not be very long now before the sun would rise.

She saw that the house belonged to one of her countrymen. He must be very rich, for everywhere she looked were the most beautiful things—vermilion scrolls, marble panels, tinsel charms to ward off evil spirits and great earthenware vases

standing upon carved blackwood stools.

She was beginning to realize that the man who had passed himself off as the Eurasian, who had come to the Chinese restaurant and talked to Wu-fong in French, must be an officer in the Malay police. For in the hall a Sikh sergeant came up to him and saluted, showing white gleaming teeth in a black beard that curled up to his cheeks.

A few words passed between these two, and then E Tsung became frightened again; she believed that she had been betrayed. For quite suddenly the man whom she had come to regard as her protector disappeared. Without a word to her, even a glance in her direction, he passed through a doorway to the left.

Hip Wing sat in an armchair. A Sikh policeman was on duty at the door. A junior officer of the Malay police, with a revolver in one hand and a cigaret in his mouth, was leaning disrespectfully against a Confucian tablet that hung on one of the walls. It was to him that Seton spoke.

"So you've got him all right?" he observed.

"We formed a cordon round the house," said the other. "They had no time to put up much of a show."

Hip Wing glanced at Seton and gave a friendly nod of recognition. Fully dressed in Chinese robes, with his face shining in the lamplight and his gold rimmed spectacles upon his nose, he looked fatter than ever.

"Hip Wing," said Seton, "a word with you. Or would you prefer to be called Jong-kwo?"

"That is immaterial to me," the Chinese answered.

"Then you admit your connection with the so-called John Company?"

The Chinaman opened his pudgy hands. They were hands with such short fingers that they looked like the webbed feet of some kind of flabby reptile.

"I admit nothing. Why should I?"

"You have been shown the warrant for your arrest?"

Hip Wing was still unmoved.

"Am I to regard that as a justification of this outrage?" he asked. "I know enough of the law to be aware that I am innocent until I am proved guilty."

"We have all the evidence we want," said Seton. "We have got enough of your people to begin with. Song Hwa, Komai and several others. Aitken is dead."

Even then the Chinese never moved a muscle of his face.

"What you tell me does not interest me very much," he remarked. "Because I do not happen to know any of the men whose names you mention."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the other. "Then, if you don't happen to know this girl, she may remember you."

He was out of the room and back again in a few seconds, holding E Tsung by an arm.

"E Tsung," said he, half whispering, "don't be afraid, little girl. There are three of us here to protect you. Look at that man and speak the truth. Tell us, have you ever seen him before?"

The girl stared—and then shrieked. With her face buried in her hands, and crouching, she tried to run from the room, but Seton caught her and forced her hands from her face.

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, in answer to his repeated questions. "My father! That is my father. Fang-kau."

Hip Wing had not moved, but his face had gone a strange color. And his whole body was trembling. He might have been some monstrous jellyfish washed high and dry by the tide.

Seton turned to his brother officer.

"Take this girl into another room and look after her," said he. "She has had a rotten time of it, poor little thing. I'll join you as soon as I can, but I may be a few minutes.

"Hip Wing," he went on, when E Tsung had left them, "I've a question to ask you. Would you rather be hanged by the neck in Singapore or die by *ling-chi* in Peking? Torture of the tenth degree, for the murder of your own son. The girl you saw just now was the daughter you sold into slavery."

Hip Wing took in a deep breath. He

sat with his hands together, his fingers interlaced upon his great stomach. For a long time he seemed to be thinking; and his thoughts, whatever they were, had the effect of bringing him composure—even, in some subtle Chinese way, a measure of satisfaction. When he spoke, his voice was completely under control. He was even gracious and polite.

"It is all over," he said. "I am ready to confess everything. I am even ready to die—more ready than you think. I beg to congratulate you, Mr. Seton. I think there is nothing more to be said."

"You have been told, of course, that anything you do say may be used in evidence against you? Tomorrow this news will be all over the Far East, and the John Company will collapse. A ship without a rudder soon ends on a reef."

Hip Wing, who had removed his spectacles, was gazing at the canvas ceiling with a vacant, faraway expression.

"I have taken a great pride in the organization," said he, as if speaking to himself. "There are not many men in the world who could have done what I have done. And I am not yet fifty. I would rather tell the story of my life to you, Mr. Seton, than to a newspaper reporter. Pray be seated. Help yourself to a cigar."

SETON drew a chair up to a small camphorwood table upon which he placed his revolver. He wisely declined Hip Wing's invitation to smoke.

"My life has been an eventful one," the Chinese began. "Like many great men, I have risen from small beginnings, but I had always a remarkable aptitude for making money. My real name, as my daughter has said, is Fang-kau. My father was a prosperous rice farmer in the province of Nganhwei. In that part of China, as you may be aware, there are many Taoist superstitions among the countryfolk, to which section of society my honorable family belonged. When I was quite a little lad, my father presented me with a brass necklace that had the virtue of placing me under the special protection of Hsuen-tan, the god of wealth. You may laugh at me, Mr. Seton, but I still believe that it was because of that necklace, which I still wear around my neck, that I have achieved both riches and distinction."

"Possibly, though I should account for it otherwise," Seton observed. "Varied and almost brilliant business capacities, and neither a moral sense nor a sense of pity."

Hip Wing paid no attention to the interruption. He appeared to be deep in his thoughts, as if collecting facts in his memory.

"I began on a certain New Year's day," he said, "with a string of copper *cash*. That string of *cash* was the foundation of my fortune. In a small way of business I had spent twelve months as a usurer among boys of my own age; and on the occasion of the great Chinese festival, as no doubt you know, all debts are paid promptly and with interest. Thus I found myself a capitalist.

"I spent this money," he continued, "in a somewhat peculiar way. I had faith in the spirits. I invested the whole of my string of *cash* in the divinations of a professional fortune teller in Tai-ping-fu. This worthy man consulted the three coins, the mystic cycle and the tortoise shell, and found nothing in the horoscope of Fang-kau but continued and increasing prosperity.

"My money was not wasted; for from that time forward I was assured of success. I knew that Hsuen-tan would befriend me; and I set about me to discover by what means I could best attain my ambition. After much thought, I decided that I could not do better than to present myself a willing convert at the foreign mission station at Tang-chau.

"Here for sixteen years I ate Christian rice—as the saying goes—though I continued to observe the precepts of Lao-tse. I learned to speak the English language. I married in the mission church a girl of my own country who was very beautiful, by whom I begat two children, a boy who

was tall and strong and a girl who was beautiful."

"The boy you murdered," Seton interposed. "And the girl, who has a birthmark on her forehead, you saw again tonight."

Hip Wing actually smiled.

"With that part of my history you seem to be so familiar," he remarked, "that I need not waste valuable time. I obtained three thousand taels for E Tsung, and with this money I changed my name and went to the city of Nanking. There I opened a bank, in which I am afraid many people lost money, before I appeared in Swatau."

"In what capacity?"

"I was a pepper merchant then, and my name was Kang-yaw. It is true, I did cultivate a certain amount of pepper, but I bought more for purposes of exportation, and there were few deals in which I lost money. I had made a great deal of money before I left Swatau. The South China Bank was always ready to advance loans up to seventy per cent. on the wholesale price of merchandise held in bond in their godowns. When I had established my credit, and had even obtained some reputation for the high quality of my pepper, I procured an advance on a certain consignment—and left the treaty port hurriedly and by night. I fear the bank, who claimed the produce, was somewhat out of pocket over the transaction; for, when examined, Kang-yaw's pepper bags were found to contain pepper to the depth of two or three inches while the rest of the produce was sand."

"I remember hearing of that," said Seton. "It happened when I was in Hongkong on leave, studying the Cantonese dialect."

"Yes," Hip Wing sighed. "It was not so many years ago, but time passes rapidly. I have played many parts in these few years—more than you have ever played, Mr. Seton. Indeed, I would grow tedious if I told you everything. I was a rich man before I conceived the idea of the John Company. There were only five of us when we started, and I was elected head of the company in the usual manner. We sat in a ring and each man picked up earth, and he who had most earth in his hand was elected head of the society. Observe, I have very small hands; but each of those four men was very careful not to pick up more earth than I did. You see, if he had, he would not have lived very long—even as I shall not live very long."

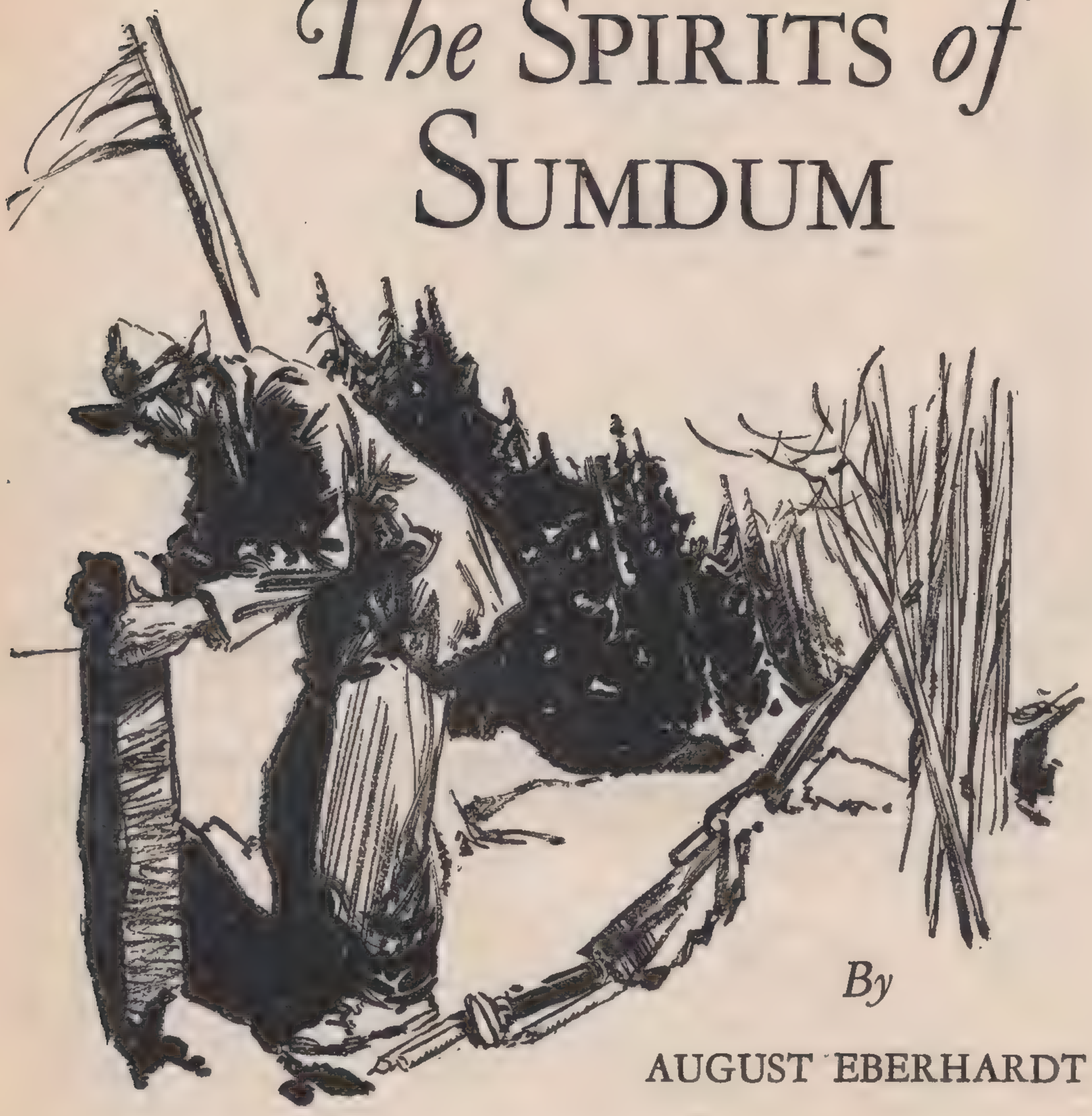
Hip Wing had closed his eyes. His face looked terrible in the gray light of dawn that was now stealing in through the windows.

Seton sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Just, Mr. Seton, that I took poison before you arrived. A slow poison, because I was not sure, and if things looked at all hopeful, I could easily make myself sick. As I have no intention of being sick, you need not excite yourself unnecessarily. And shall I continue my story?"

The SPIRITS *of* SUMDUM



By

AUGUST EBERHARDT

A Story of Alaska

THE instant the drowsy hum of the motor came trembling across the far flung solitude of the sunlit bay, the breed rose from his recumbent position on the beach to court instead the seclusion of the wooded shore. A moment later his crafty, pock marked face appeared framed amid the leafy screen of alders at the rim of the forest, where its scowling presence furnished the one and only flaw in the prime, titanic harmony that was Sumdum Bay.

The tide was low, the water smooth as glass, except toward the entrance of the bay where the white horses of the tidal swirls dashed in frenzied caracoles around and between the menacing black teeth of numerous craggy and sunken reefs. Toward the east stretched a narrowing vista of opalescent water framed by precipitous, rugged and snow crowned mountains, whose capacious, stony laps cradled

perspiring "baby" glaciers. Farther back the contour of the inlet became lost in a purple haze, and only the straggling peaks of the highest mountains stood forth in glittering, snowy profile against a clear, blue sky. It was from behind that haze shrouding the upper end of the mighty gorge whence issued at intervals a low rumble as of distant thunder. Back there, behind the purple mystery and in the very heart of the Alaskan Coast Range, great tidal glaciers groaned in constant travail, while giving ephemeral life to a brood of chill, swan-like riders that dotted the bay in their slow progress toward the wide waters and oblivion. Back there also lay the home of the mountain goat, the grizzly, the marmot—and the spirits.

It was because of the spirits of Sumdum, the dreadful *yehks* and *nawloks* of the natives, that no gaily decorated totem pole graced the shores of the bay. Rarely did the cedar dugout of the Thlinget wet its ornamental prow in the tide rips at the entrance of the bay—and then only after due and solemn sacrifice had been made to the jealous *Thekt-yehk*, the spirit of the waters.

Some days before, when Cultus Pete had steered his light canoe through the foam ringed reefs, the churlish water god had looked in vain for a propitiatory offering of tobacco from the scoffing mixbreed. Though born and raised amid the superstitions of his mother's people, the slant eyed offspring of a Chinese cannery worker and a Chilkat squaw had somehow blossomed into a professed skeptic, a materialist with an amazingly developed scent for easy profits—a talent which he consistently and unreservedly employed in a sedulous effort at reaping where he had not sown.

Cultus Pete's own earnest faith in the presence of spirits somewhere along the lonely reaches of Sumdum Bay had no more to do with superstition than deviled ham owes to the machinations of his Satanic majesty. The spirits which Cultus expected to raise had nothing of the eerie and impalpable about them. He conceived them to be substantial, both as to material presence and intrinsic value. Also—and most important—he expected them to be easily and profitably negotiable.

It was this unfaltering belief in the presence of spirits somewhere along the rock ribbed fiord that, a week earlier, had caused the wily breed to abandon a safe but modestly remunerative enterprise as a fish pirate, to follow instead the beck of quick prosperity. For five days now he had enjoyed the ample privacy of Sumdum Bay while waiting to see his faith substantiated in ripe reality.

The drone of the approaching motor grew steadily louder, and presently the silent sentinel, watching from his shaded vantage point, saw the boat, a shiny white dot against the background of blue water, creeping slowly into view around the limestone cliff that formed the northern gatepost of the bay. Without diminishing her speed the little cruiser entered the tide rips; and for some exciting minutes the breed watched her bobbing, turning and twisting through the boiling current that surged between the jagged and foam sprayed rocks in a manner that hinted at long and familiar acquaintance with the dangerous channel. When finally the little vessel emerged upon the placid waters of the bay the breed issued a low grunt. It might have been meant as an expression of admiration, but it sounded more like a whine of fear for the daring spirit who guided the wheel of the cruiser.

For some time the bow of the approaching boat pointed straight in the direction of the interested spectator; then, when within a hundred fathoms of the beach, the vessel swerved slightly to starboard and kept following the shore toward the hazy, distant reaches of the bay. As she turned, the breed's keen eyes caught a momentary glimpse of the gilded lettering on her stern—*Busy Bee.* The name roused a soundless chuckle in the watcher's throat. She was about to lead him to the hidden hive.

WHILE the echoes of the cruiser's exhaust came rolling down the rock walled gorge the breed launched his light cedar canoe from its hiding place above the beach; and presently, under his powerful strokes, the little dugout shot swiftly away in the wake of the vanishing boat. The latter had meanwhile become a mere white speck, distinguishable from the many floating icebergs only by the fact of its swift movement.

Presently the steady purr of the distant vessel became fainter and finally ceased altogether when the cruiser disappeared in a cleft-like branch of the great gorge. The breed, whose keen eyes had watched its movements closely, rested the oars athwart his boat and rolled a cigaret.

"Trail's gittin' hot now," he mumbled after breathing a succession of smoke ringlets upon the calm afternoon air. "Somewhere, up in that little branch inlet, there's a honeycomb waitin' for hungry li'l Pete."

Some time later he too reached the place where the *Busy Bee* had turned off from the main inlet. Cautiously he rounded the rocky point and looked down the mile-long extent of water, to where an outjutting tongue of tree covered rock caused the little fiord to narrow down to a slender passage.

"He's back in the basin," the breed concluded while swiftly he rowed across the intervening distance to the outjutting point of rock.

Reaching a place where the shore was less steep, he pulled his light dugout into the concealment of the brush above. Next he picked up his rifle from the bottom of the boat, and was about to enter the thick undergrowth, when he reconsidered and returned the rifle to the boat. He realized that in the delicate scout work before him the cumbersome rifle would prove a handicap. Once more he set out and advanced in the shadow of the trees across the narrow tongue of land which separated him from the head of the little inlet.

Shortly he looked down upon a clear sheet of water, a nearly circular basin somewhat more than half a mile across. Close to the near shore lay anchored the *Busy Bee*. Smoke rose from her stovepipe; and, as the breed crawled to the rim of the brush within a stone's throw of the boat, his flat Tartar nostrils caught the smell of fried bacon. Her owner was having supper.

The mongrel sat down to await develpments. His thick, blubbery lips spread in a crafty smile. He knew that he had tracked down the *Busy Bee* to the immediate vicinity of her hidden hive. Before night came on he would, in all probability, have advanced his station to the dignity of a silent partnership in a highly profitable business. The swarthy breed blessed his luck and offered mental incense to the sagacity of Cultus Pete.

Suddenly he shrunk into an attitude of rigid alertness when he saw appear on the deck of the little cruiser Blackjack McDonald, the owner and sole occupant of the boat. Blackjack was a man in his early forties, tall and straight of figure with a pair of keen, gray and somewhat close set eyes, that looked fearlessly from under the brim of his Stetson. His firm lips were shaded by a trim black mustache. Trim and neat was the expression best fitted to describe his general appearance. He was a bachelor suspected of many love affairs; but in the matter of his loves, as with his business, Blackjack kept counsel with himself alone.

The man was ostensibly engaged in the business of trading for furs. He made his home on his boat, cruising among the many islands of the Alaskan archipelago in the interest of trade. However, there were those who knew that fur was not the only article of trade which Blackjack carried on his boat. A select clientele of mine owners and cannery officials had come to depend upon the itinerant fur trader for their supply of choice liquors. Blackjack was known to handle none but the best of imported, bonded goods; while the fact that he was able to supply these at any time—regardless of how strictly the usual liquor channels across the Canadian

boundary were guarded—pointed to the existence of a considerable cache. But where that cache was located not even his most intimate friends could discover. It had remained for the wily breed to trace the profitable secret to its lair.

BLACKJACK McDONALD threw away the stump of the cigar he had been smoking and set to work launching the dinghy from the deck of the cruiser. He sculled the short distance to the shore where he tied the dinghy's painter around a boulder, and then entered the dense brush that covered the hillside above him.

From his hiding place, not more than thirty steps away, Cultus Pete watched the man's movements with eager, almost breathless interest. He rose and, slinking noiselessly through the brush, advanced in a parallel line with the trail of the white man, whose progress was plainly indicated by the moving tops of the bushes.

Some distance up the hillside, amid a small, level clearing strewn with shale and boulders, Blackjack came to a halt. Beyond the clearing rose a barren limestone cliff, whose precipitous face precluded any thought of farther advance. Cultus allowed that they had arrived at their joint destination and his oblique black eyes began to glow in his eagerness. A little to one side of him, and overlooking the clearing, a group of wind twisted spruce promised a safe hiding place for himself, and also a much better position for observation. In a few careful steps he gained the shelter of the dwarfed trees and was in the act of congratulating himself upon the clear view the place afforded when suddenly, from a branch above his head, sounded the fiercely scolding bark of a pine squirrel.

The effect of its shrill chirping was not confined to the breed. Instantly, upon hearing the animal's voice, Blackjack had turned on his heel, scenting rightly that some intruder into the animal's privacy had caused its protest. For fully a minute he stood with the ugly blue barrel of an automatic pistol held to the level of his shoulder, while his cold, steely eyes bored into the leafy screen that only partially covered the spy. The breed's heart pounded in his throat. His dark face paled to an ash gray while, without moving an eyelash, he remained in exactly the same position in which the squirrel's fit of temper had surprised him. For once in his life he came to appreciate his dark skin, which blended perfectly with the somber surroundings.

The squirrel suddenly ceased its noise, ran to the end of the branch and leaped gracefully to the ground. By this time the white man seemed satisfied that the unusually violent outburst of the temperamental little rodent had been caused by some passing animal. The look of the killer in his face gave place to a bored expression. He shoved back the gun to its holster that lay concealed under his left armpit, and turned his back upon the trembling spy.

The terrible nervous strain of the past minute had made the cowardly breed too ill to rouse himself again to that pitch of interest which had sent him upon his dangerous quest. Having sunk to the ground in a tremor of fear, he was thus prevented for a time from following the movements of the white man out in the clearing. When next he raised his head, Blackjack had disappeared; but near the farther end of the clearing he saw a gaping black hole in the reddish face of the limestone cliff.

The opening in the cliff was about three feet in diameter, and nearly round in shape. At the time Cultus had first looked upon the cliff the hole had evidently been covered by the large, flat slab of rock which he now saw lying on the ground beside it. During the short time that he had spent recovering from his nervous shock, Blackjack must have removed that rock from the opening. As the breed looked he saw the rays of a flashlight flitting through the darkness within the cave. Still shaken with fear, Cultus allowed that he had seen enough for the present, and sneaked cautiously from the dangerous vicinity.

By the time the gentle gloaming of the North descended upon the lonely inlet, the mix-breed—his courage reenforced by the feel of his rifle in his hands—made his way back to where the *Busy Bee* lay anchored. He found Blackjack engaged in loading four square cases into the dinghy and conveying them aboard the cruiser. After stowing them in the hold, the white man disappeared in the cabin forward. For half an hour longer a light shone through the portholes. When that too went out, Cultus felt assured that the skipper of the *Busy Bee* had crawled into his bunk.

Cultus Pete, with his rifle resting across his knees, sat motionless while the scene around him gradually became enveloped by the shadows of night. With the dwindling of the light the surrounding mountains closed in and imprisoned the forlorn basin like gigantic walls of cold, gray steel. Long after the image of the little cruiser had dissolved into a shapeless blur, the snowy peaks remained reflected in the water like pallid specters. For some time the oppressive silence of the wilderness swathed the scene as with an invisible cerement; then, suddenly, the ground beneath the drowsy sentinel was set to trembling, and from the direction of the great tidal glacier at the head of the main inlet there sounded an eery, cyclopean murmur, as if the earth were talking in its sleep.

The titanic voice of the glacier seemed to revive some snatch of half forgotten Siwash lore in the breed's sophisticated mind. Rising, he stretched himself, and while a derisive smile flitted across his dark face, he sneered:

"The spirits of Sumdum! They're sore at something. Ha! Let 'em grumble!"

IN THE semi-darkness of the sub-Arctic summer night Cultus Pete easily found his way to the cave at the foot of the cliff. He found the hole still open—a sign that Blackjack intended to return to it in the morning. Cultus dropped to his knees at the entrance of the cave and struck a match. It lighted up the walls of a narrow tunnel that seemed to widen as it led back into the mountain. He crawled ahead for some distance and then, finding that he could no longer feel the roof of the cave, he rose and struck another match.

Instantly the feeble flame conjured up a veritable fairy palace of reflected light. Before him opened a vast cave from whose lofty ceiling glittering stalactites depended like clusters of icicles. The floor of the cave was planted with stalagmite cones, striving to meet the grotesque, pendant forms above them. In places where they had succeeded, elephantine pillars, like mighty, gnarled trunks of oaks, seemed to support the roof of the cave.

It was not for long, however, that the wonders of the crystal cave could keep their spell upon the mongrel's mind. Something of an interest far beyond the measure that nature's marvels could command drew the man's attention as soon as he had recovered from the strange and unexpected sight.

There, all about him, and piled high between the scintillating pillars, were cases upon cases of bonded liquor. Ponderous, broad bellied and wicker encased demijohns stood upon the floor in careless disorder. Cultus Pete, who had looked for a bootlegger's meager cache, had found a distillery's warehouse, a fortune in liquor.

In a niche behind a stalagmite curtain stood a number of uncased bottles. The breed picked up one marked with three stars, pocketed it and staggered from the cave as if drunk from the very sight of so much liquor.

Day was dawning when he crawled out into the open. He felt dazed and bewildered by the magnitude of the fortune he had discovered. The surprise had been complete. He had started out on the present venture in the hope of getting away with two or three boatloads of the forbidden but precious trade article. His highest expectations had not gone beyond a thousand dollars' profit from the coup.

"Bah!" he sneered aloud, unmindful of

the danger he thus incurred. "A thousand dollars—when the cache contains no less than a hundred thousand dollars' worth of booze. Why, it's a fortune for any man, enough to feather a feller's nest for the rest o' his life!"

At a safe distance from the cave Cultus Pete found a place that offered a good chance to watch the boat and the shore. He drew the bottle from his pocket and sat down upon a rock. With the blade of his pocket knife he transfixed the cork, and extracted it from the bottle by a deft twist of his hand. Then he drank long and deeply.

The fiery liquor quickly freed his mind of the stupor that the magnitude of his discovery had engendered. He, whom the sight of liquor had intoxicated, seemed sobered by its taste. For the first time now he came to realize that the wealth contained in the cave meant nothing more to him than that his original plan of getting away with perhaps a thousand dollars' worth of the goods would certainly succeed. Two or three trips in his dugout to the liquor cache was all he could accomplish with safety during Blackjack's absence. Upon his next visit the bootlegger would almost certainly become aware that his cache had been robbed, and any subsequent venture would be like inviting certain death. No—Cultus reasoned clearly enough—beyond the modest tithe which he might collect during the next few days, he had nothing more to hope from the treasures of the crystal cave; at least not while Blackjack McDonald remained alive and able to defend his property.

The breed took another long pull at the bottle and then, for a long time, he sat sunk in meditation. His narrow, slanting eyes had contracted to mere slits, while the black pupils remained glued to the cruiser below him. If he stirred now and then, it was only for another sip of the liquor—the effect of which began to tell on him. His face, never handsome, became set in a cruel, determined cast, while his eyes assumed a treacherous glint. Finally he picked up his rifle, noted carefully that its magazine was loaded with five shells. Then he took a sixth shell from his pocket and inserted it into the breech of the gun.

Upon the lofty crests of the mountains enclosing the basin the early morning sun began to paint with a swift and lavish brush. Snow field, glacier and ravine each received its proper color: orange for the snowy peaks, purple for the precipice, cobalt for the clefts. Lower down, amid the ice filled gorges, the tints of argent and lapis lazuli emerged softly from out of the dwindling shadows of dawn. From under the thin layer of rising mist the basin appeared—broad and smooth and lonesome. A solitary hair seal circled slowly around the cruiser, staring with wide, wondering eyes at the strange intruder.

The breed pulled a watch from his pocket and squinted at it drowsily.

"Ha' p'st two," he maundered. "Can't do no bishnesh till he comes 'shore—*hic*—lots o' time for a li'l snooze."

With that he leaned his back against a rock behind him and closed his eyes.

CULTUS PETE woke with a sudden start to the sputtering of the cruiser's exhaust. He had overslept his chance—the cruiser was leaving! Raising his head above the brush, he saw Blackjack in the act of pulling the dinghy aboard. On the hatch beside him stood two bulky demijohns which had evidently been taken from the cache that morning. The breed muttered a string of curses between yellow teeth. What a chance he had missed when that man went ashore!

Suddenly the scowl on the mongrel's face cleared. He picked up his rifle and hastened through the dew covered brush to the tongue of land that formed the bottle neck of the inlet. There he lay down behind the root of a tall spruce whose branches overhung the very tip of the rock. Twenty feet below him the incoming tide rushed like a mill race through the contracted neck of the inlet to fill the broad basin that lay beyond.

Presently, around the corner of the bluff, the *Busy Bee* hove slowly into sight.

Blackjack McDonald stood by the wheel on deck. As the cruiser met the swift current of the narrows her progress seemed reduced to a creeping pace, though the whine of her motor proclaimed that she labored under top speed. It was a curious sight—to behold the mighty bow wave, the foam churned wake, to watch the nervous trembling of the craft—when yet she made apparently such little headway. It seemed as if some powerful magnet at the bottom of the narrow channel tried to hold her to the spot.

The man lurking behind the root of the tree bit his lips with nervous impatience while he watched the boat along the sights of his rifle. Finally she had crept into a position right abreast of the rock and within thirty fathoms of the ambushed hijacker. Here, at the narrowest place, the current surged with a speed that almost equalled that of the heavily panting boat. For some time the cruiser seemed rooted to the spot. It was the opportunity the mongrel had awaited.

Carefully he shoved forward the barrel of the rifle and lined up the sights with the glittering silver cap of a pencil that protruded from the upper, left hand vest pocket of the bootlegger. With the crack of the rifle the man at the wheel staggered and stared wildly toward the shore. Then, suddenly, he crumpled to the deck. The echoes of the shot reverberated through the gorge while the assassin stood at the edge of the bluff and calmly watched the spectacle of the unleashed power of forty horses, suddenly bereft of guiding reason and left to run amuck.

Without a hand to guide the rudder the cruiser turned broadside to the current and headed blindly for the sheer rocks of the opposite shore. There her port bow brushed against an overhanging snag, which changed her course and sent her racing back toward the quiet waters of the basin. In the manner of a beheaded chicken she floundered around in circles for some time, until finally she tried to climb the shore near the place where her late owner had kept her anchored during the night.

The breed had meanwhile hastened down the opposite side of the bluff where his cedar dugout lay concealed. Now he came gliding upon the swift current of the narrows. Cultus leaped upon the deck of the cruiser and fastened his shell of a boat. With a bare glance at the prostrate figure upon the hatch cover, he entered the cabin and stopped the engine. When he returned he dragged the inert body from the hatch and descended into the hold. Cultus was no waster—not where liquor was concerned—and the cargo which the bootlegger had taken aboard must be saved. He carried the cases and demijohns forward, where he lowered them over the bow on to the shore.

With the cargo safely out of reach of the high tide, he once more returned to the boat and started the engine. Thanks to the rising tide he found no difficulty in backing the cruiser away from the shore. He steered the pirated craft for the center of the basin and there dropped the anchor. A satisfied smile crumpled his thick lips as he watched nearly all of the chain run through the hawsepipe before the anchor touched bottom.

"She'll rest quiet enough down there," he murmured, as he returned to the cabin.

For some time he was occupied in searching the boat from stem to stern, but of the many articles which appealed to his greed he selected only a few which later could not be identified. He took some money contained in a wallet, picked up some grub, a flashlight and a handful of candles.

These articles he deposited in his cedar canoe, and then returned to the boat and opened the petcocks of the two gasoline tanks, allowing the inflammable liquid to run into the hold. Without a qualm he took hold of the stiffening body of his victim and dropped it down the hatch. Next he picked up a stick of stove wood and, twisting some cotton waste around it, soaked it with gasoline. Of the same liquid he filled a bucket from the spouting tank and sprinkled it liberally over the deck of the cruiser. This done, he took to his canoe and paddled some thirty feet away from the doomed boat.

Here he applied a match to his torch. Swinging the flaming billet above his head once, twice, he flung it upon the oil soaked deck. At once there was a dull crash as the roof of the cabin split open like a roasting chestnut. A panting, roaring tongue of flame shot up toward the heavens. A rain of fiery drops descended from the spreading plume of smoke above the boat. Within the circle of some twenty feet around the cruiser the smooth surface of the basin offered the anomalous picture of a lake afire.

The breed paddled to the place where he had unloaded the cases of liquor. The excitement of the past hour had parched his throat. With eager, trembling fingers he ripped off the lid of a box and extracted a bottle. He flung away its straw covering and broke the bottle's neck against a rock. His prominent Adam's apple rose and fell with each swallow until half of the contents of the bottle had disappeared down his throat. Cultus placed the decapitated bottle upon a case near by and sat himself upon another. His system responded gratefully to the sting of the alcohol; it tingled upon his strained nerves like the charge of a galvanic battery. Cultus Pete felt pleased with himself. The grimness, the foulness, the odious savagery of his morning's work were lost to him in the contemplation of the fruits it bore him.

Out there in the floating crematory the only other sharer in the secret of the liquor cache lay. No living human being, beside himself, would ever know or suspect the manner of Blackjack's demise—and thirty fathoms of water would effectually cover whatever the flames might leave of McDonald or his boat. He had achieved the perfect crime; that precluded all chances of untoward consequences.

Cultus took another drink.

IT DID not take long for the hellish flame to devour the upper works of the cruiser. Small puffs of steam began to mix with the thick, black smoke—a sign that the fire had eaten throuhg the hull below the water line. Shortly there came a sputtering and hissing, and through the vapor Cultus saw the stern of the boat rising out of the water slowly, like the tail of a sounding whale. Then, with a graceful genuflection, it dipped forward and went down. When the cloud of steam had lifted from the water, the surface of the basin stretched serene and unbroken—a picture of smiling peace.

The idyllic calmness of the scene was suddenly shattered by the muffled roar of moving ice masses which came from the direction of the head of the main inlet. While the weird echoes of the miniature cataclysm still reverberated through the mountains, the heir to the largest liquor cache in the North presented the broken bottle in a mock salute toward the source of the commotion.

"Here's to the voices o' the spirits, the spiteful *yehks* of h'nted Sumdum Bay!" he toasted drunkenly. "Most useful watchdogs o' my cache, an' guaranteed ter scare away any prowler short of an enlightened mind like myself. Long may they growl!"

In one long draught the breed emptied the bottle and smashed it against a rock. To him the future looked bright and rosy—his plans were made. Tomorrow he would carry away the first of many a valuable cargo of liquor, but today he would spend in appraising the extent of his newly acquired riches and in celebrating his inheritance.

In pursuance of this plan he staggered through the brush in the direction of the cave. There he found the large, flat stone snugly covering the entrance. Cultus regarded the perfect manner of concealment with genuine admiration.

"Good job—damn' good job!" he exclaimed in drunken approval. "Blackjack was no fool. 'Twas a case o' pittin' my brain 'gainst the slickest white man on the coast; an' I beat him."

He laid the flashlight and the candles he had brought with him upon the ground. Then he stepped in front of the slab of rock and tipped it slowly toward him. For the fraction of a second his befuddled brain rang in alarm, when his eyes caught

the glint of a brass wire that led away from the slab into the dark interior of the cave.

But the warning came too late. The heavy rock, tipped beyond its balance, crashed at his feet. Instantly the thundering roar of two simultaneously exploding barrels of a shotgun filled the entrance of the cave.

The echoes of the explosion kept ringing through the ears of the prostrate and mangled breed in rising and falling waves. Gradually their sound diminished, becoming more distant, more gentle—soothing like a lullaby. Cultus Pete stretched his trembling and shot torn limbs as if to prepare for a long and restful sleep. He closed his eyes—to open them no more.

The RITUAL DRUMS *of* YORUBA

By T. SAMSON MILLER

BOOM-BOOM! Boom-boom! Boom-boom! The double beats came from where the Shango Temple—Shango, the god of thunder—poked its totem poles and big spread of thatch out of the oil palms that fringed the dense jungle. It was the first time I had heard ritual drumming with a double beat. That it was unusual drumming, suggestive of terrible things, was evident from the petrified faces of the Yoruban carriers. They hurled themselves flat on the ground and threw dirt over their heads in abject prostration. They said that Ebele and Agnolo were talking. They said it was the voice of Shango. But how could the drumming be both the voice of the god and the talk of Ebele and Agnolo? And who were Ebele and Agnolo?

The Yorubans would not talk about it. Africans draw a curtain on their gods and beliefs before the whites. I sensed a big story, if only I could get at it.

Fortunately, a Nupe troubadour who had attached himself to me, probably as a spy in the pay of the *oni*—the ruler of Yoruba, or of the king of Bida—was not under the spell of the Yorubans. His name was Tamunoilumini, which means God's good will, meaning again that Tam had come to his parents when they had almost given up hope for a child. Tam had a *gilau*—a half gourd with two strings, something like a mandolin. In the bowl of the *gilau* were dry seeds. Tam was an artist, telling his story with musical ac-

companiment, and thus I learned the use of the seeds.

Tam sang in pidgin English of the time when the Arab slavers swept down the Niger. Their guns, their superior military organization, their swift horses gave them an easy victory over the spear and bow men of the tribes. They spread such terror in the land that to this day if a new born babe shows the least hint of Arab blood it is killed. The tribes took to raiding among themselves for slaves to give to the Arabs, thus purchasing immunity for themselves. Even the Yorubans, the proudest and strongest of the tribes, bent their necks to the Arab yokes. Long files of heart broken blacks were driven by hippo thongs up the long, long trail to the Timbuktu slave markets, where came slave dealers from Morocco, Egypt, Algiers.

Thus lamented Tam, and rolled the seeds in his *gilau* in imitation of the cries of women and children or tapped the parchment in imitation of the war drums. Then he went on to tell of a deed that ranks Ebele and Agnolo among the greatest heroes of the world—a deed that makes the heroic legends of the Vikings seem pale. The double beat from the Shango temple had come from drums made from the skins of Ebele and Agnolo.

Ebele and Agnolo were the twin sons of the *oni* of the Yoruba. They had just reached man's estate at the time of the Arab invasion. One noon they were lying under a baobab tree, lamenting the sad plight of their people, when they heard the voice of Shango in the tree, even as Joan of Arc, distressed over the plight of her people under the English invasion, heard voices bid her rise and go to the aid of the French dauphin and drive out the invaders. Perhaps what Ebele and Agnolo heard was a rustling of the foliage in a breeze. But in their distressed state they took it for the voice of Shango.

They hid their faces in the ground and put dirt on their heads. Then Shando bade them go to their father, the *oni*, and tell him to call the kings of the tribes, the headmen, the warriors and the priests to big palaver. Then when all were assembled the *oni* must do a great deed that would rouse the tribes out of their fear and bring them together in united action against the Arabs.

Ebele and Agnolo ran to the *oni* with the words of Shango. The *oni* said—

"What great deed shall I do?"

The twins answered that Shango would reveal that through them when the big palaver was called. So the palaver drums sent forth the word and the kings and headmen, the warriors and the priests came secretly to Yoruba. The *oni* said the words of Shango. Then he asked of his twin sons what he must do. They answered together.

He must slay them in the sight of the assembled kings and chiefs and warriors. Then the priests were to prepare two new drum logs. The *oni* must then drain the blood of Ebele and Agnolo into gourds, take their skins from their bodies and burn their flesh and bones. Their ashes must be put in the drum logs, their skins stretched over the ends. Then all must drink of their blood, for the god-head had descended into them, and thus the spirit of Shango would enter into all men through the drinking of their blood. Then when the drums sounded it would be the voice of Shango, which would lead the tribes to victory over the Arabs.

The terrible deed was done. The kings and warriors were aroused to a fighting fury. They followed the twin drums, as the French followed the victorious standard of Joan of Arc. They fell on the camps of the unsuspecting Arabs with great slaughter and drove them from the Niger.

Thus ran Tam's story. I do not know if he had it quite right, but the twin drums are a fact. So, too, is the invasion of the Niger by the Arabs, and the sudden furious rising of the blacks against them.

Some day a missionary will want to destroy the twin drums of the Yoruba. Meanwhile their *boom-boom* quickens the heart and blood of the Yorubans and arouses pride of race and pride in their great heroes, Ebele and Agnolo.

SKIRMISH

Rustling and Fighting South of the Border Line

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

WHEN the Nevada gold boom went bust, I went bust with it. But I had a racehorse left, and that, I believe, was worth more than all the millions of gold stock in Nevada at that moment. A whole manner of life, built on a big pile of paper, came down with a howl when the paper burned away to ashes. And I, who had been a millionaire on paper, found a pleasant feeling of security in the eight hundred solid gold dollars that I obtained in exchange for my racehorse.

After settling my bills at the Montezuma Club in Goldfield and at several restaurants and saloons, I found myself in possession of my personal honesty and five hundred dollars with which to begin a new life. After all, I seem to be akin to the traditional cat which, being entrusted with nine lives, can afford to fall from a high window and pick its easy

way on the sidewalk below immediately, as if nothing of moment had happened.

So that two days after extricating my bones from the débris at Nevada I found myself comfortably lounging in the lobby of the Hotel Green in Pasadena, California, wondering what to do next. Being hungry, and having devised no plan, I had not a thing to do next but have lunch. I therefore stepped into the restaurant of the hotel; and in doing so, I bumped into a distinguished looking Mexican gentleman. He begged my pardon, and I assured him that the fault was mine and passed on. After lunch there was still nothing to do next, so I lounged again in the lobby. The Mexican gentleman greeted me. We exchanged a few cordial and meaningless remarks, and drifted into the bar. Before the day was over we were old friends. I knew that he was Ricardo Flores Magon, a rancher and revolutionist, exiled by Diaz, and he knew of my adventures in Cuba, Alaska and Venezuela, of which he had heard vaguely before meeting me.

As I was leaving for El Paso the next day, Flores Magon asked me to be ready to take part in his fighting when it broke out. Without suspecting that there was an immediate possibility of this—Diaz had been in power for over thirty years, and his arm seemed to be as strong as ever—I agreed readily. Don Ricardo took his leave of me, assuring me that we would meet again soon. I sincerely hoped so, but did not believe it.

I had not been many hours in El Paso when I came across Pepe Fuentes, now officiating as a waiter in one of the numerous cabarets that lined the Street of the Devil—El Diablo—in Juarez beyond the river. Pepe was a young fellow, in his late twenties. His grandfather had led a revolution in Ecuador and had almost become president—that is, he had been executed a few minutes before that event would have taken place *de facto*. And Pepe, though an adept at all the arts or earning a devious living, had a hankering deep down in his heart to be respectable. This he had lost hope of achieving by patient toil, for he had no talent whatever for doing any honest job that was well paid. He possessed, however, eminent faculties for getting rich quick with just a little bit of good fortune, so that his plan in life was to commit one big undetected felony and then be honest, influential, charitable and generous the rest of his years, until he dropped into an honored grave. I had a great respect for Pepe's yearnings, and was always willing either to help him get a decent job or to put him on his chosen way to respectability.

I now offered Pepe one more chance to become respectable. Would he join me in rustling operations across the Border? He gulped down his *tequila*—we had entered a joint near the bridge—and said that he was at my disposal. He informed me that Governor Cachazas of the State of Chihuahua had more cattle than he had ever bought or bred, or counted, and that it was fitting that he should be our angel. I nodded assent and told him to meet me that evening in Juarez to round out our forces.

A tour of El Diablo that night netted us five more companions, all members of my old body in those regions. It was decided that Pepe Fuentes and the five Mexicans were to "borrow" seven saddled cayuses during the night and have them ready in the corral of El Jarabe Tapatío, a honkytonk near the edge of the town.

That night I enjoyed what I knew would be my last sleep in a soft bed for many weeks, in the Hotel Paso del Bravo, and early the next morning a peon was carrying my luggage to El Jarabe Tapatío, where several hours later, after a long and refreshing sleep, I was given a room in which to change my clothes. I emerged dressed as a Mexican *charro*—silver tasseled sombrero, short jacket, bell trousers and jingling spurs. Pepe was waiting for me at the bar with Mike O'Reilly and Jimmy Sears, two members of the old outfit who had evinced a desire to join my enterprise. They were both cowhands by trade, miners by necessity and adventurers by

birth. I welcomed them to what was at hand, and they ran out to get themselves horses.

Pepe and I rode unobtrusively out of Juarez and crossed the sand eastward toward the Sierra del Fierro, where our companions would be waiting. Before leaving, however, I could not resist the temptation to call on my old friend, the *comandante* of Juarez, a lame old fellow with an understanding heart who had a black eyed daughter that it was a pleasure to behold. An ironical thing had happened to the old *comandante* with his daughter. The girl was more vivacious and independent than Mexican ladies were allowed to be. The *comandante* thought the best thing would be to send the girl to college in the United States, where the wild freedom of the Mexican desert would be polished down. The poor old man did not know that the United States is not precisely the place to teach a woman to give up her freedom. The girl came back more independent than ever, with this added attraction: that now she could explain why she should be independent; she could argue it, and she could win the argument. The *comandante* was powerless in her hands.

But now Maria Luisa did something that not even I expected of her. She showed a desire to join the expedition. Out of deference for my old friend, I said no, emphatically, and she appeared to acquiesce. Secretly, I was wishing that she would join us because, quite aside from the charm of her companionship, she would be a guarantee that all forces sent in my pursuit from Juarez would be sure to lose my trail.

Late that night I came upon the camp of my companions in the Sierra del Fierro, a range of dusty hills rising like an island out of the desert. We made our immediate plans, told stories in the hot flicker of the camp-fire and then dozed off.

Early in the morning I sent Mike O'Reilly with three Mexicans to the Santa Catalina cañon in the Corotos Mountains, south of the frontier and east of the small railroad town of Carrizales. They were to put our old adobe dugout and corral into shape, as that would be the actual center of our operations, although we would give the impression that our headquarters were at the Sierra del Fierro. In the meantime, as we were urgently in need of cash, I would scout around with the rest of the outfit for strays to "borrow."

We accordingly headed south toward the Laguna de Patos, a wide, shallow lake on the other side of which were located the main ranches of Governor Cachazas. About halfway to the lagoon we spotted a group of strays—about two dozen head—whose yellow hides were hardly visible in the glaring sunshine against the yellow sand dunes. We began closing in on them, spreading ourselves as wide as we could. They spotted us and stampeded through the dunes. We could not see them now, but only caught a glimpse of one or two occasionally. We did not know whether they were sticking together or spreading out beyond any possibility of our gathering them.

We approached cautiously, to avoid raising too big a cloud of dust; but as things were, we could not be certain of roping in more than three or four, and that was not worth the effort. In moving across Mexico on a rustling expedition, it is good to have cash on hand to pay for your necessities, for otherwise a bandit might be mistaken for a politician and lose the sympathy of the people.

Once in awhile a little column of dust would rise above the dunes sufficiently to reveal the passage of a steer. Then we decided to scare them with shouts and shots so that they would scramble a bit and give us a good notion of where they were going. When the dust began to whirl up, we realized that they were much closer together than we had thought, and we closed in. This led us in a few minutes to a depression in the level of the desert, a sort of sandy crater surrounded by dunes, out of which now rose the thin glittering dust of the Chihuahua plain like a whiff of smoke.

They were all there, at the bottom of

the depression, the whole two dozen-odd of them. But the victory was not ours. As we sl d down the dunes to the bottom with the biting sand on our faces Maria Luisa, the daughter of the Juarez *comandante*, was already roping them in. When I got to her side, hat in hand, and rather bewildered, she only said—

"I have just borrowed these from Governor Cachazas, and now I give them to you as compensation for forcing my disagreeable company on you."

María Luisa became a member of the expedition, of course, and thus assured us at least the negative protection of the Juarez *gendarmes*.

We counted on the discreet aid of some of Cachazas' cowhands, who were old friends of ours, and when Mike O'Reilly brought several of them to my supposed headquarters at Sierra del Fierro the next day they agreed to keep us posted as to the turn of events and to supply us with fresh horses in case of need. While this conference was going on, Sears and Maria Luisa were herding the strays north, to introduce them into the United States somewhere between El Paso and Eagle Pass, and dispose of them in a quick and not too unprofitable deal with people well known to Jimmy. Maria Luisa's presence could help Sears out of any untoward meeting with the Mexican authorities.

TWO OF the Cachazas cowhands remained with me, bringing the total number of my men to ten, just enough to begin operations on a comfortable scale. As one of my men arrived that night from the Santa Catalina cañon with news that everything was O.K. there, we were ready for the heavy work.

We spent the rest of the night out in the desert, covered by so many stars that I believe not even the angels could see us through them. Only a lookout remained behind to lead Sears and Maria Luisa to the cañon.

Governor Cachazas' ranches lay mainly between the Laguna de Patos and the Santa Catalina cañon, touching the Juarez-Chihuahua City railway on the west. We were to make an early morning roundup and push on to the cañon where the Cachazas brand would be obliterated. This was a bold stroke and had to be executed before the *rurales*—the highly efficient Diaz country police—got too definite wind of our operations. As a measure of protection, five of the governor's cowhands were to go along with us to give the whole maneuver a slight appearance of routine work, in case of necessity.

However, as foresight is the soul of business, I sent O'Reilly and four other men to round up strays on the farther side—the southern side—of the cañon, something meager and relatively innocent, and to hang around the eastern entrance of Santa Catalina. They were not to defend these strays against the *rurales* or against the governor's men, but were simply to abandon them and run for their lives in the direction of the Border in case of pursuit. The eminent usefulness of this plan was to be proved the next day.

As I remember it, we did not wait till dawn to unleash our raid, but started considerably before that time. Before the stars turned from blue to gold we were on the spot and working like hell. By the time they turned to silver we were driving several companies of beef on the hoof before us. And when the last ones were finally roped in by the rising sun—the great cowpuncher of the sky—we were well on our way to our corral in the cañon. It was then that I detected a tall thin column of dust moving slowly along the edge of the horizon. Almost as soon as I had noticed it and called it to the attention of my companions, it lowered and vanished. I thus recognized it as the sign of a lone horseman who, having spotted us, had galloped off to report.

We therefore speeded up the march, yelling and howling the beasts into a slow trot. Before the *rurales* appeared we had shoved the whole slow mob of them into the cañon and were taking our

positions to hold the Diaz men off as long as we could.

There must have been about forty *rurales* all told, and they came flying through the dust. Before coming within gunshot, they spread out in groups of twos and threes and began a cautious approach. They had to be careful, for the entrance of the cañon was protected by huge boulders from behind which one man could disable many *rurales* in comparative safety.

We began taking shots at them, more to show them that we were there than with any expectation of hitting them—they were too far off—but soon we realized that they had spread out so much that they had actually disappeared. Only two small groups of them remained within our range of vision. This put me in something of a quandary, though their maneuver was exactly what I should have undertaken in their place. This, however, I knew: that I could never find the corral located in a gorge of the *sierra* if I had no previous knowledge of it. The paths leading to it were stony and precipitous. No tracks would be left either by horses or cattle and the entrance defied detection.

The *rurales*, I supposed, would be surrounding the *sierra*, which was not more than forty miles across, in the hope of making sure that we did not leave it. But in doing so, they were bound to lose touch with one another. I therefore left three men firing away at the horizon and followed the cattle with the rest.

To the south of the cañon the *sierra* rises beyond the timberline to craggy red peaks visible for hundreds of miles through the hot sunshine of the desert and pasture lands. The timber resembles an enormous camp of tall, narrow tents, a camp of towering very thin giants. Below the timber, the *sierra* breaks into complicated ravines cut in solid rock and allowing vegetation to spring up only in patches. But as the mountains roll north the stones beat out the vegetation and all that is offered to view is an upheaval of blazing rocks. Over this part of the *sierra* you can travel for miles without setting your foot on a patch of soil.

It was over this hard, silent ground that we now drove the cattle, leaving no trace of our passage. For this reason, and because of the peculiar position of our corral at the bottom of a ravine that opened like a cave, I felt perfectly at ease as long as the *rurales* could be kept from following too close upon our heels. And I knew that the *rurales* had not ventured into the *sierra*. My men at the entrance of the cañon were still firing at the buzzards, probably to save the *rurales* from a too hasty burial. Getting out of the *sierra*, however, was a horse of a different color. That would be more complicated, especially if the *rurales* mustered sufficient strength to patrol the foothills from north to south and from east to west. Our fate in this respect was in Mike O'Reilly's hands. If he behaved like a coward at the eastern end of the cañon and ran away in a convincing enough manner, we could make our getaway. Otherwise there would be a long siege, probably ending in an unceremonious hanging.

WHEN I arrived at the corral, bringing up the rear of my men, the branding job was already proceeding. A red hot frying pan had been applied to the Cachazas brand to obliterate it. Grease was then quickly rubbed in to stimulate the growth of hair. Then my own brand was applied. It was a weird picture that greeted my eyes amid the bellowing of the cattle and the singing and cursing of the men. The ravine was narrow and deep, the rocky walls closer in toward the top, leaving only a ribbon of sky visible. Several fires had been started, reddening the walls on which the shadows of men and beasts scrambled in fantastic postures. One end of the blind ravine had been fenced off for the cattle and several men were now engaged in rolling new boulders to the fence to strengthen it.

The sky darkened and a rift of stars appeared overhead. The branding was going on and an ox had been killed for

beef. No more shooting was heard toward the west, but a faint crackle of rifle fire now floated in from the opposite direction. It kept up throughout the night. In the morning one of the men with O'Reilly rushed in to report that his group had roped in about fifty strays and driven them slowly to the eastern entrance of the cañon, which they had entered unobserved before nightfall. During the night the *rurales* had come up, and O'Reilly had been caught apparently unawares and been compelled to do some shooting. As soon as day broke, O'Reilly made a dash out of the cañon with all his men except the messenger, leaving all the strays to fall into the hands of the *rurales*. One man had been killed, the others had broken through in the direction of Coahuila. The man who brought the news of this had seen the *rurales* round up the cattle near the entrance of the cañon.

This was exactly the sort of music that I wished to hear. The *rurales* would believe that we had entered the cañon through the west and made fast time to try to get out of it through the east before they could round the *sierra*, but that we had not been able to make it in time and, being caught, had abandoned the cattle to save our lives. It has been said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and the *rurales* were now in possession of the little knowledge necessary to put them off the track entirely. Mike O'Reilly could be relied upon to turn up beyond the Border later on, broke, unconcerned, and asking for his share of the big bunch of cattle actually taken. I would be there to give it to him.

In those days rustling cows was regular gentlemen's sport across the Border, at least as long as the cows proceeded from the southern side of the line. It was, no doubt, in the highest spirit of sportsmanship that a small group of men undertook to drive hundreds of animals through vast stretches of desert and pasture lands, sometimes keeping for weeks on a slow trail, avoiding detection under wide open skies and risking an unceremonious swinging death from the nearest tree. It was lucky that the nearest tree was often far away enough to give a man time to think, say his prayers, bribe his captors or give them the slip.

The dullest and least sporting part of the game was the branding of the cattle before risking the open daylight with them. The operation was painful, noisy and unheroic, and it entailed a long inactive wait. That business of adult, energetic men loafing around a dark ravine—which would be a cave but for the narrow opening on the sky—waiting for hairs to grow on cattle, was certainly uninspiring, almost unbearable. Many times we were tempted to quit the cañon and push on through the plain to the frontier with the marks of our doings written plainly on the hides of the animals. But we needed the cash, and we thought we might as well keep our lives, so that better counsel prevailed.

Maria Luisa, who was a great hand at dancing the fandango and singing Mexican Indian ballads, would have made our waiting passable; but I had thought it best not to keep a lone woman among so many lonely men—made sentimental by solitude—for such a long period of time. She would have had too many proposals of marriage. I had sent word to her to wait for me at Juarez, or, if she did not want to let her father know of her whereabouts, at El Paso.

It took all of three weeks for the cattle to be presentable, and at that time, after patrolling the whole northern side of the *sierra* personally, I decided to get out of it, not through the cañon but, so to speak, across country.

Ten days later we had safely crossed into the United States near the Coahuila Line, and eleven days later the cattle had been turned into cash at a ranch between Eagle Pass and Corralitos. During the long, nerve racking, whooping march from the *sierra* to the border many minor interesting adventures might have happened. I regret to say, however, that only one big adventure befell during that

time—we covered the distance unmolested. One small party of men that might have been bandits, or colleagues, or even government soldiers, did come up to us one day, but they only wanted to borrow a couple of steers for beef, and we gladly let them help themselves. We left them making an enormous roast beside a solitary giant *yoshua* tree.

OPERATIONS of this sort continued practically undisturbed for several months. In the intervals between expeditions I could be seen in the garb of a prosperous American mining operator on the streets of El Paso, at the Country Club with Maria Luisa, or in some garish Juarez cabaret, enjoying my leisure but saving most of my funds for a projected trip to Europe. My men met me on the streets and passed me with a blank look on their faces; they had never met me before. Only when I casually fingered my necktie in passing them would they know that there was a conference that evening at John Lee's laundry. John Lee was a Chinese who dealt in Oriental Bull Durham and could occasionally use the discreet help of my men. He had also become Americanized and Mexicanized to the extent of preparing a hot *chile con carne-chow mein* which he would often let his friends wash down with *tequila* in his back room amid the fumes of incense and the aroma of unwashed laundry. Cleanliness, John Lee used to say, using many more L's than were necessary, was next to godliness, but it didn't pay enough. That made him careless about the laundry and enthusiastic about other business.

Quite often it was one of my men who passed the high sign to me, and that meant that he had gambled away his money and needed a stake. I always managed to provide him with what he needed, because the business we were engaged in was one where no fixed wages or dividends are possible.

There is something in human nature that enjoys a double life. Probably—if I may be allowed to get solemn for a moment—a dissatisfaction with the one life that has been allotted to us in the great counting house of Fate, or a chafing feeling of being imprisoned in the same hide and the same personality for too long a time. At any rate, I certainly enjoyed the curious alternations of my life at this juncture. One day I was talking American politics to the Governor of Texas at the club, the next day I was introducing a couple of U. S. Senators to the explosive delights of *enchiladas* in a Mexican café run by a Chinese and financed by an American across the Line; that night I might be chewing the rag at John Lee's, and two days later I would be rounding up cattle one hundred miles away, dirty and sweating and as happy as a runaway schoolboy.

One day as the sun rose from the rim of the world dripping the hot fog of the Mexican plain, we discovered that we were not the only ones beating up the dust within the circle of the sky. We were on our way to Carrizales to do some investigating, and we would prefer to be alone. But the column of dust floated nearer and, though we had no incriminating evidence about us, we felt uneasy. Whoever it was that was coming toward us, I prepared my men for a fight, in case diplomacy proved insufficient. There was no mistaking the direction in which the cloud of dust was moving. It kept swelling as the distance diminished, and pretty soon it was near enough to reveal a group of *charros* approaching at an even trot. An elderly gentleman with white whiskers rode at their head. This gentleman, I discovered through my field glass, was none other than Governor Cachazas himself, the executive chief of the state and the erstwhile owner of most of the cattle we had been dealing with.

Governor Cachazas being an old friend of mine, I slowed down my pace and loosened my gun a bit. Old friends should be received with courtesy, but it is well always to remember that in the same way that old wine frequently makes new vinegar, old friends frequently prove to be excellent raw material for new enemies.

The minute the governor recognized me he rode up to me, took hold of my hand and shook it heartily. He was very kind and seemed very much interested in my good luck, for he began inquiring in his benevolent, paternal way where I had obtained all the pretty cows that he had heard I was selling around Eagle Pass.

Realizing that Cachazas had a very definite suspicion of my doings, and knowing that a good Mexican has a greater respect for cool effrontery than for slinking moral protestations, I decided to take the bull by the horns—or the governor by the beard. Smiling genially, I said—

"Why, Governor, I thought you knew!"

"I? How should I know?"

"Why, of course, you must have known that most of those cattle were yours and that I was borrowing them. Otherwise you wouldn't have let me get away with it."

The governor was looking at me appreciatively. He was admiring my cheek and estimating the fighting potentialities of my men.

"You can't convince me," I went on in the same bantering tone, "that you couldn't have stopped the whole business if you had wanted to. Why, Governor—you?"

Cachazas broke into a laugh and patted me on the back, patronizingly.

"Good for you, boy," he said. "That's the way I started out. I borrowed a lot of cattle and then sent a check for them to the man I had borrowed from."

"Of course," I answered. "That's precisely what I'm intending to do—as soon as I get back to El Paso."

"That's all right. Any time it's convenient." The governor laughed as he rode away.

The tense moment was over. Cachazas had calculated the chances of a fight and found them bad for him. After all, why should he get into a scrap, when all he had to do was to be good natured, ride away and then send a gang of *rurales* after me? He now knew how many men I had, how they were armed and where we could be found within the next few hours.

THE INCIDENT, of course, brought the game to an end. Cachazas was no fool, and now that he knew what he had to deal with he would not delay in dealing with it adequately. In fact, I did not believe that I had more than a couple of hours' start on what would develop into an efficient and relentless pursuit. Therefore, I rode with my men westward for a few miles, came to a halt behind a hillock and disbanded them then and there with instructions to ride in all possible directions, get somehow to El Paso and wait for word at John Lee's. When we split up, the governor must have been bewildered as he watched fourteen clouds of dust whirling in the breeze and tried to decide which dust was Nogales'.

I started northwest and made as fast time as my pinto pony would allow me. Two days, I calculated, would bring me to the Border, which I wanted to cross east of El Paso and at night.

Two mornings later I awoke within striking distance of the Border. I had spent the night shivering in my blanket, right in the center of the horizon's circle. When a powerful and thoroughgoing Mexican, like Governor Cachazas, is looking for you, it is best to avoid landmarks. I had ridden shy of trees, pastures, lakes, springs, making my trail through sand and mesquite where I would have to be found by luck and not by any predetermined plan. My pack contained nothing but a few pieces of salt codfish—of all foods for a dash through the desert!—and my canteen was getting uncomfortably dry. However, I was not much afraid of starvation, or thirst, or men on horseback. What worried me was the telegraph. Surely by this time Cachazas had wired all over along the Border, and I would have to buck a well patrolled line.

There is a terrible loneliness in wide skies; but there is also a feeling of security in them stronger than can be derived from walls or trees. It is, I suppose, the open distance, which renders you liable to discovery and pursuit, but pro-

tects you absolutely against treachery. I rolled my pack slowly, even luxuriously, looked around me in the growing light and saw that I was perfectly alone. Only three banyan trees, far away to the east, kept me company within the line of the sky.

I thought it best to proceed without breakfast. Salt codfish made for thirst, my water was low, and a man would rather be hungry than thirsty in the desert—or in prohibition countries. So far as the codfish was concerned, I might as well have taken pretzels to church. I began plowing the mesquite at a fast trot.

When the first strong heat of the sun began to hit my face over my right shoulder, I noticed that I was no longer alone. What appeared to be a considerable troop of horsemen were approaching from the direction of the banyan trees. In the distance they seemed to be immobile, but in the half minute that I stood and watched them, their bulk expanded and the dark dust above them swelled like a rain cloud driven by a heavy wind. There were at least one hundred men and, although their movements seemed slow, I knew that they were galloping like mad. They were not yet within gunshot, so that there was only one thing left for me to do—run like hell. Which I did.

My pinto was a good sport and he negotiated the sands with an amazing lightness. For over an hour he kept my pursuers at the original distance, but after that they began to draw near. I couldn't blame the pony. Two days of feeding on parched mesquite may be conducive to speed but certainly not to endurance. I myself had a dizzy sick feeling at the pit of my stomach and once in awhile I remembered, with that grotesque lucidity created by hardship and danger, that I was thirsty.

It was hot and disagreeable and I was practically dead. The Border was by no means within immediate reach, and even the Border would be patrolled, so that to approach it in a helter-skelter, unpremeditated fashion, as I was doing, was far from a good thing to do. I was riding like the devil only because some foolish instinct wanted to postpone my death from nine o'clock until ten. It was as certain as sunrise that I would be overtaken or blocked in less than one hour.

A quick glance over my shoulder showed me that the men were spreading out, fan-like. Any deviation on my part from my actual due-north course would bring me nearer to them. Curiously, I began to be more and more conscious of trivial things. I remembered a cool crab flake salad I had had at the Paso del Bravo Hotel; a tall ginger ale highball slipped to me across the polished bar of a Juarez café on a sweltering afternoon came vividly to my mind. And I remembered that the dress Maria Lusia had worn at the last country club dance had been white with large black decorations. It was all crazy.

My pony tripped and rolled over, half burying me in a heap of sand. I was dazed, and before I could extricate myself two men were at my side, smiling, unarmed, dressed in the garb of wealthy *rancheros*. I tried frantically to find an explanation, for they had come up to me alone—their men, I noticed vaguely, were more than a hundred yards away; why they were smiling, why they were there at all. They were not *rurales* and they seemed to entertain the friendliest feeling toward me.

"*Buenos dias, señor*," one of them said. "Why in such a hurry? We are your friends."

"At least," the second man explained, "we hope that you will consider us as your friends."

I asked them what they wanted. This was still crazier than the crab flake salad, the highball and Maria Luisa's dress.

"Why, we were sent by your old friend General Flores Magon—Don Ricardo—to look for you. You promised to join him, and as you would not know where to find him, now that he is up in arms, we came to show you the way. One of your men, who knew that we were friends of Don Ricardo, put us on your track."

Upon my request for more explicit information, the *ranchero* who had spoken first told me that the revolution against Diaz had at last broken out, that Flores Magon was all over Chihuahua, his forces split into guerrillas, and that Don Ricardo has asked them to place themselves at my orders. It seemed that Don Ricardo had made up his mind that my intimate knowledge of the whole central Border region made me the ideal *jefe expedicionario* in those parts for his revolution.

"And just what sort of a revolution is this?" I inquired, reasonably enough, since I was supposed to risk my neck for it.

"Why, a socialist revolution, señor."

"What?"

"Yes, señor. The people want their land. It has been stolen from them by Don Porfirio and his henchmen, and the people want it back. It is simple."

The other *ranchero* made it plain that the invitation I had received was not one to be refused.

"What could we do if you refused?" he explained. "We have given Don Ricardo our word to escort you to his headquarters, and we could not dream of disappointing him. Don Ricardo esteems you very highly."

There was nothing that I could do against such courteous strong arm methods. Besides, I myself had promised Flores Magon to join him. Then again, my cattle business was ruined, and I felt the soldier of fortune's ever present urge to act in a disinterested cause. And here was the cause brought to me rather strangely in the middle of the desert, and placed at my feet with a rare and compelling courtesy. I accepted.

A Story of a Taxi Holdup

A PAIR *of* SHOES

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

TIMMY FALLON was imbued with exceeding wrath. It was a manner of wrath not difficult to understand, for Timmy was in a predicament ill calculated to soothe a temperament exceedingly fiery by nature. He trudged along a dark and empty and rain sodden street, walking out in the center of the pavement. The street was one of the quieter and more genteel thoroughfares of residential Flatbush, in Brooklyn, and the sidewalks were overhung with graceful maples—trees which have the property of showering the pedestrian with unlimited quantities of rainwater. Hence Timmy's progress along the center of the street, out of reach of the beneficent maples.

This course brought him small relief, however. It was night, the neighbor-

hood was still and long abed, and he was far from home. And he had no shoes. Reflecting heatedly as he trudged along, Timmy regarded that as the crowning injury. Had he shoes, it might still be possible to retain a philosophic viewpoint. Lacking them, with his feet squelching in puddles in the asphalt and his socks rapidly being reduced to tatters, his aggressive Celtic instincts were inflamed beyond all soothing.

At the avenue intersection a short quarter block ahead, a horse drawn milk wagon hove in view, plodding sedately through the night. Timmy spied it and broke into a run. He shouted and waved a hand, bidding the driver halt. It was the first sign of life Timmy had encountered in over half an hour, and any sign of life meant aid for one badly in need.

For a second the driver paused. His face peered from the interior of the vehicle in astonishment at this interruption of Brooklyn's early morning quiet. He beheld a sturdy, medium sized figure, hatless, coatless and shoeless, advancing upon him. He sensed storm and wrath and violence in the determined face of the runner. For a second the driver paused, and then he seized the whip and belabored the broad back of the amiable beast between the shafts. The horse gave a surprised start and set off up the avenue at a mad gallop. The wagon came careening after, bottles and metal cases rattling and banging in its interior.

When Timmy arrived at the intersection, and halted to breathe hard and fill the night with unhallowed imprecations, the milk wagon was blocks away and still going. Timmy sat down on a curb and racked his memory for the few profane terms he might have forgotten.

A few blocks farther on in the sleeping district, when Timmy proceeded, he saw a news delivery truck unloading papers at the door of a stationery shop. The driver, however, spotted Timmy first, and when Timmy arrived on the scene the truck was already out of sight.

Again, where a parked flivver lurked in the shadows of the maples, his advent brought a lingering pair of lovers to sudden life, and sent their flivver chattering up the street like a frightened animal. Timmy succeeded in making contact only once, and then with a late returning drunk of small aid and less interest. The drunk hailed him as a brother and followed Timmy for a block.

Eventually the lights of a subway station shone ahead, brilliant in contrast with the darkened houses and leaf obscured street lamps. At the station entrance a taxicab was parked, driver standing alongside patiently waiting for a call. Timmy experienced a bound of relief in his stormy heart and advanced on the hackman as on one of sympathy and understanding. The taxi man observed his approach and, as he studied the drenched and wrathy figure, he began to grin. Timmy stood before him, cursed, finally smiled ruefully himself—and told his tale.

Timmy was himself a taxi driver, and he pursued his calling, as far as possible, within the confines of Manhattan Island. This night, however, he had picked up a fare who took him over Manhattan Bridge and far into Flatbush. Returning, Timmy decided to try his luck in that territory, and he parked the cab at a subway entrance, the most likely place for business. Soon a trio of young men, hard of jaw but quiet and good natured of appearance, emerged from the subway and hired his vehicle. They wished to go to an address situated in a sparsely settled section of the town. Timmy admitted ignorance of the neighborhood, but they agreed to guide him, and he set out on the journey.

It was dark and Timmy was unable to read the street signs on the way. After an extended trip the passengers ordered him to stop midway in a certain block. Timmy obeyed, coming out on the sidewalk to open the door. The taximeter registered seventy-five cents.

"Well, we made it!" said Timmy. "Six bits on the clock."

"Yeah, we made it, didn't we?" agreed one of the three. He laughed.

The other two gathered about Timmy and grinned.

"Well?" said Timmy impatiently.

"Good hacking tonight, big boy?" inquired the fellow.

"Fair. I got along." Timmy studied the speaker, and sensed unpleasant things.

The young man laughed again. There was little humor in his mirth.

"We're hoping you got along," he said. "If you ain't, we're sorry for you."

Timmy tried to back against the cab, but they hemmed him in. His head hunched a bit lower and his hands clenched.

"What's coming off?" he demanded. "What's the game?"

"Fork over! Let's see what you got hacked!"

"Stickup, eh?" said Timmy.

He told himself that he might have known. Three amiable young fellows all going in the middle of the night to the same address in a deserted neighborhood. Any hackman was a fool to fall for their racket. It was a common enough racket; Timmy knew of many drivers who had fallen prey to this exceedingly simple act of piracy. Usually, though, it was performed with the aid of a gun. These lads relied on simple strength of numbers.

"Stickup, is it?" said Timmy. "Well, try and get anything out of me!"

He swung a hard, valiant fist at the nearest jaw.

The fight lasted less than three minutes. By that time the trio had Timmy flat on his back on the sidewalk, coat torn off, collar ripped and one lip sore and swelling. They made no effort to administer a beating. They did not care to waste the time. They bore him down by sheer dint of weight, and two of them held him fast while the third went through his pockets.

"Twenty-seven bucks," said the searcher, counting Timmy's roll. "That ain't a hell of a lot! Where's the rest?"

Timmy paused in his flow of profanity.

"I got a million bucks in each shoe, safe hidden," he said. "Try and get it, you damn' ape!"

He struggled, and strove to plant a kick somewhere on the anatomy of his questioner.

The fellow thrust the bills into his pocket, dodging safely out of reach of Timmy's substantial shoe. He was grinning.

"A million bucks?" he said. "Hell, we can't overlook that!"

He seized Timmy's feet, sat on them and began removing the shoes.

THUS it was that Timmy came to be walking the rain drenched streets of Flatbush after midnight. They had examined his shoes with voluble disappointment and with reproach for his deception. They had held him securely to the last minute, and then had darted into the cab and driven off, taking the shoes with them, leaving Timmy standing in stocking feet and speechless fury on the sidewalk. And their laughter had resounded through the streets in their wake.

For the next few days Timmy had a busy time of it. The driver at the subway station had befriended Timmy and, after driving him home for replacements from his wardrobe, had taken him to a police station. He sympathized with Timmy and even refused to accept payment for the ride; but there was no sympathy forthcoming from the police. He was questioned at the station house, questioned at the home garage, questioned even at the Hack Bureau headquarters by the deputy commissioner himself.

With each grilling Timmy became more incensed. What were they looking for—to convict him of robbing himself? They found the cab abandoned and safe in the Bronx, didn't they? His employer suffered the loss of a cab's daily earnings, but he, Timmy, lost a perfectly good pair of shoes, had a suit ruined and was robbed of his own daily earnings on top of that! What did they want to do, put him in jail in addition?

No trace of the amiable bandit trio was found. They had vanished into the limbo of the city. Their photographs were not included in the rogues' gallery collection, as Timmy found after long examination, so it was concluded that the three young

men were new to a career of crime. The police, with a string of unsolved holdups of a similar nature on the books, were admittedly baffled, and they filed away memoranda on the case and released Timmy from surveillance.

Timmy was quite relieved to be able to return to work. He did not go back to his old job, however. He was angry at his boss for not shielding him from the well meant but unwelcome attentions of the police; and, besides, a certain shrewd plan had evolved in his mind during those days of idleness. To further it he wanted to get a job driving a cab as different in appearance as possible from his old taxi. He found it with a brand new fleet of hacks just going on the streets. Where the old cab was short and sturdy, the new one was long and sleek; where the old was green and white, the new was all nickel and shiny black. He bought an inexpensive gray chauffeur's uniform with leather puttees, and he wore a round cap with a leather visor. In other words, he had changed the appearance of himself and his means of livelihood so completely that any casual observer would have difficulty recognizing him.

Timmy's plan sprang from these facts, ascertained by questioning the police while in their hands: A goodly number of recent taxi holdups had occurred in outlying sections of Brooklyn. Of a definite group of these, certain characteristics were observed to be constant. Three young men of amiable disposition had perpetrated all the robberies in question. They had picked up the taxis at subway stations along Flatbush Avenue, always at a different station. And they operated late in the week, usually on Friday.

Timmy considered the sequence of dates and subway stations. Obviously it was impossible for him, or even the police, to cover every stop on the Flatbush Avenue line of transit. But since the trio never emerged from the same station a second time, it was logical to eliminate those already used. This left a goodly number of which they could yet avail themselves. How then could one select in advance the station at which they would next appear?

This question blocked all progress for some time. Timmy studied his list over and over again. And then the most important point, the point that instantly solved the puzzle, was clear to him in a flash. He wondered how so obvious a phenomenon had eluded him. The three, to avoid the danger of running into their previous victims at the subway hack stands, chose a station two stops beyond the last one each time they went into action. Making out a list in chronological sequence, the geographic order was perfect, allowing for a skip between stations. The second stop past that where Timmy's unfortunate encounter with the bandits had occurred would be the scene of their next depredation. And since they operated late in the week, usually on Friday, this coming Friday he should be able to find them at the place appointed by the chart. Timmy swore a good round oath and vowed sweet vengeance.

One last step completed his plans. Since they outnumbered him, and could so easily overpower him, it was necessary for Timmy to arm for the encounter. He drove to a certain store in his home neighborhood—a strange shop indeed to visit in search of weapons, for dolls and toy wagons and tennis rackets and party favors and other assorted gewgaws filled the display windows. But Timmy knew what he was about. He went into the place purposefully, and when he emerged there was outlined in his pocket a most formidable bulge. Timmy was prepared for action.

LATE Friday night found Timmy parked at a corner on Flatbush Avenue where late returning residents intermittently emerged from cavernous exits in the pavement. One other cab was stationed at the opposite corner. Timmy had made an agreement with the rival driver whereby all business was to go to the other with a single exception—that of a party of three amiable young men desirous of traveling

to an address in some outlying section of Brooklyn. If these appeared, the other driver was to plead insufficient gas and shunt the three toward Timmy's shiny new taxi. The second driver was more than agreeable to so generous an arrangement.

Time passed. Taxi fares came and they were whizzed off by the other cab, which on depositing them hastened back to its post. Timmy refused quite a number of rides with diplomacy and tact. He sat at the wheel and smoked many cigarets, and he watched the lighted exit of the subway unremittingly.

Then he sat up all of a sudden and tossed his cigaret away. He jerked his cap lower over his eyes and came to attention. Three young men had mounted the steps of the exit, three amiable, unhurried young men in search of a cab; a trio, one could imagine, engaged at small and unlucrative daily occupations who found zest and relief from financial pressure in commandeering the receipts of taxi drivers. They had arrived on schedule.

Timmy watched the second cab turn them down, the driver offering apology and pointing to the sleek black taxi on the corner opposite. Agreeably the three accepted his apology and sauntered across the street. Timmy withdrew as far as possible into his seat.

"Busy, driver?" one inquired.

"Nope," said Timmy.

"O. K!" said the young man. "Let's go, boys!"

They entered the cab and requested a house number on a street not very far from that along which Timmy had marched in the rain. He grunted in acknowledgment and started the motor. In an instant they were speeding through silent, shadowy Flatbush avenues.

After ten minutes of travel a voice from inside gave instructions.

"Right turn at the next corner and stop in the middle of the block, driver."

"Right!" said Timmy.

He obeyed and soon drew to a halt beneath the spreading branches of a rustling maple. Small, darkened frame houses were scattered along the street. Not a soul was in sight.

Timmy came from the seat, flung open the door, and walked to the rear of the cab as if to examine the gage on the gasoline tank. He proceeded entirely around the car and returned to his starting point as the three clambered out on the sidewalk. His hand was in his pocket as he came and he was watching them closely.

"How's the hacking, brother?" asked the spokesman.

"Good," said Timmy. He paused. "Too good to spoil!" His hand came from the pocket, and it brought with it something that shone with a metallic gleam in the shadowy night. "Stick 'em up!" he snapped.

The three were still for a second as if paralyzed with incredulity.

"It's a rod," said one. "What—what's the idea of the rod?"

"Up, you hustlers! Up, I said!"

Slowly but definitely three pairs of arms rose toward the leaves. One of the young men began to curse. Another hissed a sibilant command to silence. The third merely stared with an intense gaze.

"I just got there one word ahead of you," said Timmy. "Sorry, but you're in for a permanent disappointment."

"What d'you mean?" demanded the silent one. "This a stickup?"

"In a way," admitted Timmy.

"You can't get away with it, guy. I'm telling you! The cops'll nail you to the cross for this, and I'll see to it that they do."

"Yeah?" Timmy laughed unpleasantly. "What for?"

"For a holdup!"

"This ain't a holdup, big boy. This is what you call a holdup that didn't happen!"

There was no reply for a moment.

"What do you mean?" demanded the fellow.

"Why, that I was the poor dope trying to get along in the world that fell for your racket last time. I lost a pair of shoes. I can stand a lot of things, but not losing shoes. I got this gun and laid for you and

you walked smack into it. Now, how about those shoes?"

For answer there came a venomous oath, and the fellow moved a step. He halted suddenly as Timmy's hand came up and a gleaming and very sinister pistol was thrust almost into his midriff. Greater courage than he could summon was required by that situation. He went silent and backed slowly.

"Spread out," Timmy ordered, "and walk down the curb."

They obeyed sullenly.

"Sit down on the curb."

They seated themselves, feet in the gutter.

"Now stay there a minute while I fix things," Timmy commanded. "It won't pay you to move. The gat stays pointed your way all the time."

Timmy moved backward to the cab. He felt with one hand in the tool box beside the seat and drew out the heavy skid chains which were kept there for rainy days. He spread them out on the ground behind the three. Next he snapped together the fasteners at one end of each chain, making a single chain of double length. He lifted the weighty thing, and advanced on the sullen trio at the curb.

"Slow and easy now," he said. "Don't even crack a smile or you'll get smoked."

He draped an end of the chain about the neck of the fellow sitting on the right. Then he hauled the entire chain through one of the spaces in the network of steel links. Taking up the slack, he tightened this very practical slip knot about the fellow's neck. It made an excellent noose, one too heavy and awkward to slip out of easily.

"What the hell?" said the victim, softly but viciously. "What the—"

"Shut up!" warned Timmy.

The prisoner shut up.

The chain was wound around the neck of the fellow in the middle, and a similar noose was made. The remainder encircled the fellow on the left, and the knot was made secure by use of the patent fasteners. The three were safely shackled. Given time they could extricate themselves, but that element of time made all the difference in the world. Any fair hand with a gun could calmly shoot down all three before their efforts were halfway successful.

"Now get up," Timmy ordered.

He placed himself before his prisoners, and a sarcastic grin came on his face.

"You're a fine team of hardboiled holdups!" he told them. "You're bad and wicked and so tough that you scare people on sight. You're so wise that you got the entire Police Department buffaloed." Timmy grunted his disgust. "Horse feathers! What you need is a wet nurse! You poor saps, you're so dumb they'll stuff you and put you in the Smithsonian when you cash in. Get going!" He jerked a thumb commandingly up the block.

THE TRIO set forth, walking in the center of the street. Timmy got behind the wheel and drove the cab in second speed alongside. He kept the gleaming weapon conspicuously in sight and continued to taunt them with caustic comment as they trudged along. The fellow in the middle broke his sullen silence when the sting of Timmy's words became too painful.

"You think you're hot, don't you?" he demanded. "You lousy chiseler, you're going to be in a jam neck deep before you're through with us."

"Am I?" inquired Timmy in a tone of pleasant surprise.

The fellow growled and plodded on.

"The slogan of this hack company," said Timmy, "is 'Every driver a gentleman.' No gentleman likes to be called names. You—" he instructed the rearmost of the three—"kick him for me."

The fellow cast an appalled glance at Timmy and failed to obey. The cab swerved closer.

"Will you do as I tell you," demanded Timmy, "or do you want a crack on the skull with this?"

"This" was the vicious looking weapon

in Timmy's hand. The fellow stared at the back of his comrade's neck and suddenly let fly with a kick that jolted the victim out of all composure. The outraged prisoner swung about, uttering enraged curses, turning upon both his comrade and his captor. Unfortunately the chain gave him small leeway for action. He jerked the foremost chokingly off his feet, and when the rearmost drew back to evade a berserk swing, all three came toppling down into a tangled heap on the pavement.

For a moment the mêlée continued with great vigor. But inevitably the steel links tightened about the throats of the combatants. The foremost, whose breath was knocked out of him at the outset, pleaded in hoarse, gasping cries for the others to cease. The nether pair, realizing the seriousness of their plight, went still. They lay in the street, confused and sobered.

Timmy was watching the excitement from his seat with vast interest.

"Well," he said, "it was sure a good scrap while it lasted. All finished?"

His question was ignored.

"O. K, then," he said. "Let's be on our way!"

Slowly the three got to their feet. Giving Timmy not so much as a glance, they resumed their plodding course up the deserted street. The cab shifted into gear and crawled leisurely after.

The grizzled sergeant on duty at the local precinct station house looked up from his blotter as the door swung open. There was a pause, and then the strangest sight of his long career of law enforcement paraded through the portal. He beheld three sullen and weary young men in garb that was travel stained and sadly awry. Festooned about their necks was a weird tangle of chains, the presence of which did not seem to add to their happiness. Following them came a stocky, bright eyed taxi driver. The sergeant removed his reading spectacles to see the better at sight of a shiny new pistol in the latter's hand.

"I want to prefer charges against these guys," said the driver. "How do I go about it?"

"What for?"

"For robbery. These are the lads that have been raiding taxi drivers in this precinct. They got me once, but I got them tonight."

"Oh-ho!" said the sergeant. The mysterious holdup trio was a sore point with the entire force of that precinct. "So these are the gorillas, eh?"

"That ain't so, Sergeant," denied the center bandit. "We didn't do anything. He stuck us up with a gun when we was hardly out of the cab. We had no guns, but I'd like to know—what was he doing with one?"

"They needed no guns," said Timmy. "Not with three against one on a lonely road."

But the bandit clung to his point. It was his ace in the hole, the counter-attack by which he was going to rout the enemy.

"If charges are preferred against us," he asserted, "charges are going to be preferred against him. He's carrying a gun in open violation of the Sullivan Law. Let's see you do something about that."

He scored his point. The officer could not ignore it.

"Have you a permit to carry concealed weapons?" he demanded of Timmy.

Timmy was undismayed.

"Nope," he admitted cheerfully.

"Well, do you realize you've broken the law?"

The sergeant was angered that the complainant should be guilty of so sorry a blunder at the outset of an important case.

"Hate to argue, but I've broken no laws," Timmy stated.

"Give me that gun!" thundered the sergeant.

The eyes of the three young men were bright with victory. Timmy raised the weapon and reached over the rail to place it on the desk. But in some clumsy manner the gun slipped from his grasp before he had it safely deposited. It dropped to the floor and, incredibly, shivered to jagged fragments that scattered over the worn boards. Its interior was hollow,

and silvery glass slivers glistened in the light.

The sergeant leaned over the desk to stare at the demolished toy in amazement. Then he sat back soundly in his chair and pounded the desk top.

"Complaint dismissed!" he roared.

He fixed on the three young men, whose faces were set in expressions of horrified realization, a stern and baleful glare.

"And now, me bright young lads, we'll tend to you!"

Timmy leaned complacently on the railing and gazed at the stricken three. On his face was a grin of satisfaction that gave them little pleasure to behold.

COPRA *by* CHARLES A. FREEMAN

BILL THOMPSON, American pioneer and owner of a coconut plantation in the Tawi-Tawi Archipelago, casts critical eyes aloft at the reddish golden fruit clustering at the top of his trees.

"Time we started cutting out some of those nuts," he tells Pedro, the Zamboanganian who acts as his foreman. "The copra market's getting better."

Pedro grins, and signals to the group of half naked brown men squatting nearby, each with a sickle shaped knife thrust through his belt. The men rise, pick out the trees containing the riper nuts and commence to climb. Up they go, their fingers and prehensile toes gripping shallow indentations in the smooth trunks. Some of the trees are sixty feet high—old-timers which have withstood the blasts of typhoons.

Reaching the tops, the harvesters push through the clustering foliage, brush away the insects sure to be found feasting on palm cabbage and, lying flat, reach over to hack at the stems from which the nuts hang. *Crash! Thud!* The sound of the falling fruit echoes through the grove. The harvest has commenced.

Soon two-wheeled carts drawn by lumbering water buffaloes make their appearance, the animals urged on by drivers shaking ropes attached to nose rings. The drivers emit long drawn grunts.

"*Ooooo-eeee!*"

Women and children slip forward from the brush and, warily watching for falling nuts, collect those on the ground.

Near the open drying field wait the huskers. They are muscular men and draw high wages because of their swiftness. Before each is a steel, harpoon shaped affair mounted on a stake. The first man, selecting a nut and holding it in both hands, raises it and drives it down on the harpoon head. Three rips with a jerking movement and the husk is off. Tossing the nut to one side, the stripper signals his companions to commence, and they eagerly fall to. Money for the monte games and the cockpit is in sight after weeks of waiting.

Then the splitters get busy. With short heavy bolo blades they split each nut and toss the halves aside. Soon the sun-baked soil at their feet becomes muddy with the coconut water, and they shift to another location. Women and children gather the halves and lay them face upward in orderly rows, that they may dry.

Four days is usually sufficient to dry the nuts. The meat then commences to shrink away from the shell. Then come the spooners, provided with scooplike instruments, to remove the meat. Sun dried copra—the best—is what Bill Thompson will ship when the tramp steamer comes in.

The FOUR DUD SHELLS

A Story of No Man's Land

By BARRY LYNDON

THE OVERSEER in the Düsseldorf munitions factory frowned and the men about him trembled. When the *Ausseher* bent his hog's bristle brows above his pallid eyes it meant that some one would go from his safe job—building shells for the guns—to the Western Front where the guns spat screaming steel—and where Allied weapons bellowed in grim reply.

A moving strip of canvas ran in front of the overseer and on it were shining fuses meant for the interior of high explosive howitzer shells. Fat hands moving vengefully, he jerked yet another of the fuses on to the delicate balance before him.

The slender needle did not register as it should have done, and the *Ausseher* thundered:

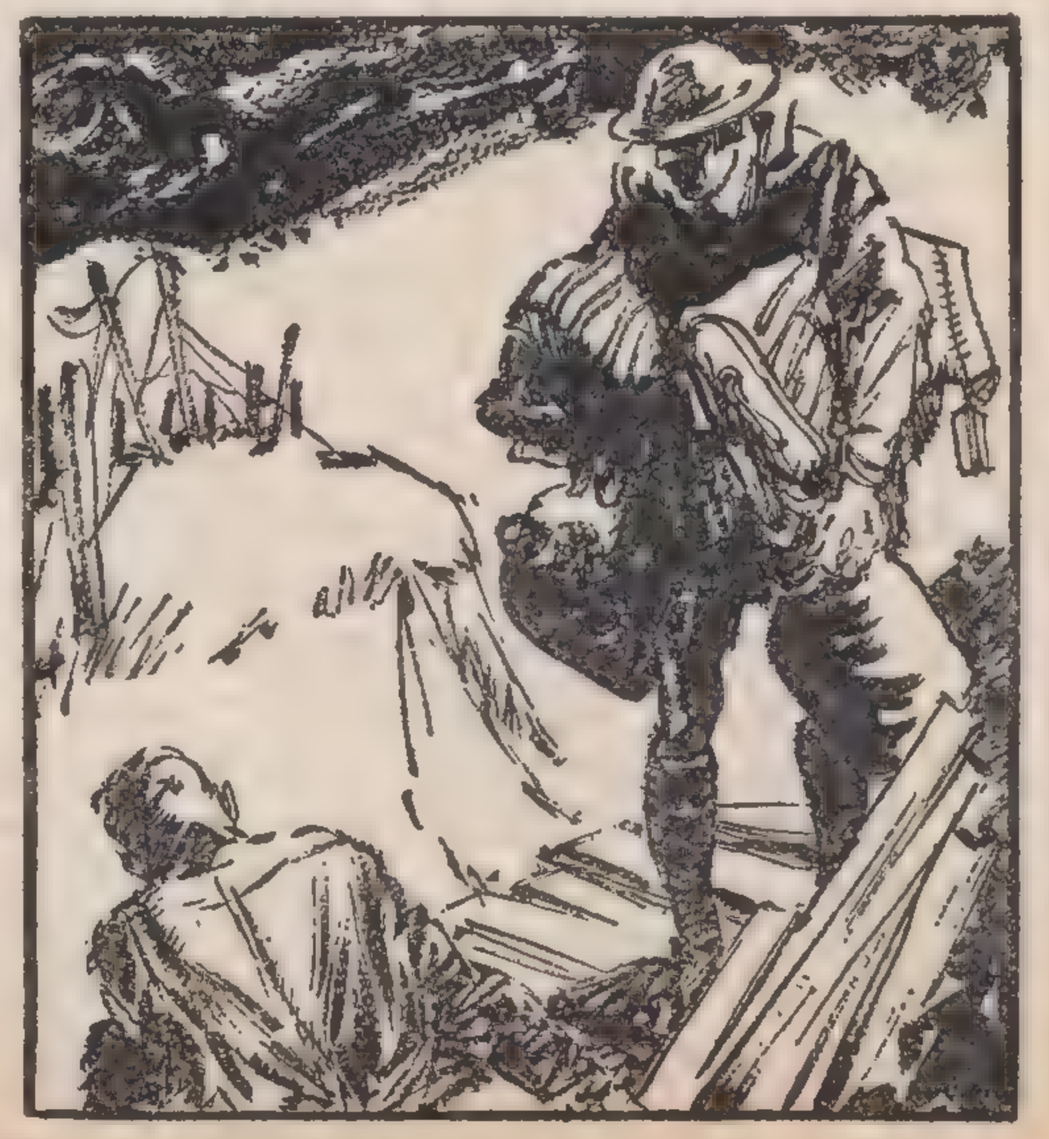
"Again! This is the second time in three days. *Was zum Teufel!* Bring Carl Braunlich to me!"

His voice carried through all the crash and blatter of machinery. From his little gallery he glared down to where German women tended lathes which skimmed steel into shape, and where lounging men watched shining driving bands pressed on to svelte shells.

The voice of the munitions factory was like a very faint echo of the mad tumult which rose ceaselessly on either side of the battered strip of No Man's Land.

The overseer stopped the canvas band, then drank comfortably from a tall glass mug which contained lager brewed in Munich. And there is no better lager than this.

"You should all of you be fighting for the Fatherland!" he told the men about him, as he set the mug down beside the balance. "You are safe while your countrymen die, and yet you can not serve



them well. Bah, I go sick inside when I see the errors some of you make! Were I ten years younger I would not skulk here and let comrades wear field gray and die for me!"

They said nothing, and presently Carl Braunlich was brought before the dreaded *Ausseher*.

"These fuses are wrong!" He wagged a pudgy finger at the man, then gesticulated toward the canvas band. "Twice has this happened, and a whole batch of shells is spoiled—when shells are needed. I shall see to it, Carl Braunlich, that you go to the Front, and there you will learn why those who have to stay at home should not make errors!"

So Carl Braunlich, very white, was put into uniform and sent to the front at Verdun, where the Frenchmen very quickly killed him.

And at Düsseldorf the shells which he had spoiled—they were all marked Km-M-3—were gathered together to be re-fused.

But some of those dud shells were not returned to the factory, because they had already been sent to the Front.

LARRY WILKES sat in a funk hole which had been hollowed out beneath the parapet of the Front line trench. He wore rubber thighboots, and his knees were drawn up to his chin to keep his feet out of the water. He was wondering why he, an American, should have paid his passage to England that he might enlist in the Royal Wessex Regiment and sit in this little hole.

He had forgotten that he had done it because he had been afraid the war would be over before America got into it.

Perched like himself on a narrow ledge hacked painfully from the sodden earth at the back of the funk hole were three Britishers. The four had come into the Ypres salient together, passing through the famous Menin Gate and across notorious Hell Fire Corner, to enter a nightmare area the like of which was beyond anything which had ever previously come to Larry Wilkes' knowledge.

Now and again Very lights flared from the German lines and set a glow quivering on the surface of the water in the trench. Every little while a man would wade past, with the water well above his knees. Occasionally a shell would burst and show the faces of the four with a lurid, reddish glare as it slashed mud against the parados.

"I don't know that I like your war so darned much now," Larry growled. "I don't mind the cold; I can go hungry and I can go a long while without poundin' my ear—but I ain't a fish!"

One of the shadowy figures chuckled and, moving incautiously, struck his steel helmet against the thin sheet of corrugated iron which roofed the funk hole.

"Cheer up, Wilkie—the rum'll be here soon."

"Not if Jerry's busy on the Crossroads tonight," Larry told him. "It'd be just my luck if the carrying party was blown to glory an' took the rum with 'em!"

They were silent after that. The fire trench was to the left of Hooge, and in parts it was not a trench at all; water had made it untenable, so that breastworks had to be built on the open ground, and German gunners amused themselves trying to knock these breastworks down. Whenever they succeeded, the German infantry, in drier trenches up the slope, would laugh and use rifles and machine guns to bowl over the muddied khaki figures as they strove to build the breastwork again.

Enemy flares, quivering as they flew above No Man's Land, lighted a water patched waste out of which stakes jutted at odd angles, carrying tangles of barbed wire. There was little to be seen from the trench parapets except barbed wire, water, black mud and queer humps at which sentries sometimes fired because they thought they moved; but the humps were past moving.

Behind the British trench there was nothing at all for a long distance, except open country that was one immense bog. This was traversed by duckboards—

lengths of wood across which slats are nailed. These duckboards formed the only roads, and to step off them meant an immediate sinking into the chill, ugly mud.

When a man did make an incautious step it took at least four others to drag him out and, very often, their united efforts failed, so that he begged them to shoot him before the mud came over his face. This may sound impossible, but every man who fought at Ypres during the thaws knows it to be true.

Where the duckboards ended, there was the support line. Everything needed by men in the front trenches—rations, ammunition, rum, mail, first aid kit, equipment—had to be humped over the narrow wooden tracks, which were constantly searched by enemy machine guns and by shells.

There was one little patch of hard ground where the duckboard trails met, and this was called Dead Man's Crossroads, because it had been estimated that at least one man of every carrying party which traversed the crossing fell victim to the German battery that continually plastered the point.

The Crossroads was, perhaps, four hundred yards behind the point where Larry Wilkes kept his feet out of the water wondering whether, in time, he might grow webs between his toes like a duck.

He was pondering this when the platoon sergeant splashed his way down the trench, lifted the wet blanket at one side of the funk hole and snarled:

"You four are detailed for a carryin' party! Go down to the dump an' fetch up the company's rum an' mail. Jump to it, an' don't start any perishin' argument with me about it!"

In absolute silence the four slopped their feet to the water and eased themselves out to the trench. They filed slowly down it, because to have moved quickly would have splashed water into the tops of the boots of the crouching sentries, and the sentries did not like that sort of thing.

"Where you goin', Wilkie?" one of them asked as the four passed.

"Rum an' mail!" the big American answered shortly.

"Good!" The sentry's white teeth showed through the grime on his face as he grinned. "Little Fletcher caught a packet off a whizz bang about half an hour ago; a tot o' rum might help him hold out until the stretcher bearers can get him away."

"Fletcher's caught a packet, eh?" said Larry, and ploughed stolidly on.

Around a bend in the trench he came to a heap of wet blankets spread out on the tops of old ammunition boxes, stacked so that they rose clear of the water. On these lay little Fletcher.

He was an undersized fellow, and he had been floor walker in some big London store, but that had not stopped his getting into khaki.

"We're going down for rum an' mail, Fletcher." Larry paused by him. "Got it bad?"

"Not much pain now, Wilkie." Fletcher smiled up at him; almost all the members of B Company liked the big Yankee. "Got an idea I ain't goin' to see daylight again, though!" A Very flare flung its ghastly glow over Fletcher's face. "Buck up with the letters—might be one for me from my girl!"

"I'll bring it back if there is," Larry said.

He went on, to stop as the platoon sergeant caught his arm, where the trench well broke and the duckboards started their wavering trail to the rear.

"Wilkes, there ain't a drop o' rum in the trench. If we can keep Fletcher warm he'll be all right; it's this blasted cold that'll do him—that, an' the damp. Get some o' the rum up here quick!"

"I will, Sarge," Larry assured him, and stepped on to the duckboards with his mates.

When men are chilled and cold, and when the wet walls of a trench prevent their getting warmth, rum is necessary to keep the blood coursing through their veins. Sometimes it will sustain a wounded man's strength.

Down the duckboards went the little file of four, with Larry hurrying his slip-

ping steps; little Fletcher was as game as they came, and Larry wanted him to pull through if he could.

Shells came over in an idle way and slumped into the bog at either hand, spouting up great flumes of earth and water, but doing little other damage, because they delved so deeply into the Flanders mud that they burst too far down to send their splintered casings flailing the air.

Bursts of machine gun bullets swept out of the darkness, and each time the four heard their terrifying, hollow rush they slumped flat to the track. But when crafty German gunners sent shrapnel, cracking in puffing balls of red fire, the four plodded straight on; ducking would only give the whining leaden balls a better target.

Very lights glimmered from behind them, showing the wood all wet and half sunken and presently lighting the low hump of Dead Man's Crossroads—safe enough now, since it was too early for the enemy battery to begin dropping shells there.

The ground was churned and ploughed and broken so finely that it was like flour under the rubber soles of their boots. They hurried across it and hit the duckboards once more.

Once Bailey slid off the boards and had sunk nearly to his waist before the others could come to his aid. It took ten minutes of mad work to get him out, and he cursed as he limped the rest of the way to the dump. He said that the mud smelled like bad apples—and that is the smell which rises when the sun is warm on a new battlefield.

THE Royal Wessex dump was at the side of a road where a low bank afforded shelter. Heré a quartermaster sergeant smoked cigarets and sat with a couple of warm blankets round his shoulders as he waited for the carrying parties to show up.

"Who are you—B Company?" he asked, as he peered at the four wet figures. "You're for rum and mail, aren't you? The rations will come up by another party leaving here at midnight. How's things up the line?"

"Fine!" Larry told him. "The sun's shining an' we're all sittin' in cane chairs; we wouldn't know there was a war on except for the newspapers. This the mail, Sarge?"

They started back, each carrying a sack which was heavy with letters and parcels. Two jars of rum were slung on poles, and each pair of men carried one of these between them. As they went, the quartermaster sergeant called a warning, while he settled himself in his blankets again—

"Look out for the Crossroads, you fellows!"

Going back was much worse than coming from the trench. Larry could see the bobbing Very lights curving high and, farther away, he could make out the flicker of German gun flashes, like sheet lightning and low down. The whole line was waking to night-time activity as British weapons searched for German transport, while German shells came over in an effort to find British carrying parties.

Larry, hurrying and intent, saw the first salvo of the night land on Dead Man's Crossroads. The shells appeared to him as quick, merged bursts, the sound of the explosions coming as one.

Machine gun bullets began to spit more frequently; they could not lie down to avoid them now, because they were too heavily burdened.

"Jerry's unloading at the Crossroads," Larry called over his shoulder.

"Don't we know it?" Bailey answered him. "I just saw the—Heh-h-h!" His odd, high pitched exclamation came with the quick *pew-ew-ew-ew!* of machine gun bullets, the sound passing as swiftly as it had arisen.

When Larry stopped and looked back, Bailey was huddled across the duckboards; the rum jar had dropped from the stick and the mail bag was in the mud. Larry jerked the bag to the boards, then bent over the man.

Without a word, Larry lifted the mail

bag and slung it against his own, then hooked his fingers through the handle of the jar and started forward once more, carrying a double load.

Shells came over more rapidly. Since the three were traversing the main duckboard track it was naturally the one which received most attention. The boards were laid in a triple stretch, and in one place a direct hit had smashed the woodwork to smithereens, leaving a cavity into which water slowly seeped.

Possibly two hundred yards from where they had been obliged to leave Bailey, a shell burst close. Larry ducked from its sudden glare; water and mud slammed with a blurred rush to his face and he was almost blown from the track. He staggered, half blinded and scraping the mire from his eyes. Then he heard a voice calling—

"Charlie's got it, Wilkie!"

A dark figure sprawled half off the boards, and the other man was dragging it back. Larry slithered until he could bend above the wounded man.

"I've got it in the leg, Wilkie. Can't stand!"

"Turn him over, Bill," Larry said, "and we'll do him up."

They used field dressings to stanch the wound. Then Larry asked—

"Can you crawl back to the dump, Charlie?"

"I'll have a cut at it. If I can't, somebody's bound to come along and carry me in. It doesn't hurt a lot, anyway. Sorry I got it—means dumping some o' the mail, doesn't it?"

"It does not!" Larry picked up Charlie's sack. "You look after that other rum jar, Bill. So long, Charlie—you'll get sent home with that leg, all right! Think of us, an' don't forget to let Bailey's people know. Better tell 'em he got it fightin' in a night attack; they won't understand if you say he was just on a carrying party."

The two shook hands with the wounded man and, each carrying a double load, went on.

They could see the Crossroads quite clearly now, and they watched the salvos as they came over. Now and again a cluster of shrapnel would snap above the spot.

"Jerry's got it taped properly tonight," Bill observed as they paused, well short of the Crossroads. "It's goin' to be touch and go getting through."

"Got to do it somehow," Larry told him. "Little Fletcher's waitin' for his rum." He laughed coolly. "Better stop and watch the shells for a bit. If Jerry's sending them over regularly, there's a chance we might slip through."

They lowered the heavy rum jars and crouched above them.

Shrapnel came in a burst which studded the sky with red; the shells were overshot and exploded a full fifty yards beyond their target, spraying the earth all around the two. Larry heard the lead and the slivers of shell casing whizz down. Then he started to count the seconds between that and the next burst.

"Shrapnel that time, Bill! One—two—three—"

He counted up to twenty-five, then came high explosive, churning the ground at the deadly crossing and filling the air with smoke and fine earth. Again Larry counted, and at the end of another thirty seconds more H. E. came over.

He went on counting patiently, only to find that the time which elapsed between salvos varied from twenty to forty seconds and was always irregular.

"I reckon we'd better go a bit nearer and then lie flat," Larry growled. "We'll have at least twenty seconds, maybe more if it's one o' them long intervals. Come on, Bill! It's no good waiting any—"

He broke off as he turned to his companion.

Bill lay on his side close against the jars. The first burst of shrapnel had hit him.

With the sling of his rifle threaded through the handles of the two rum jars—the weapon itself having been abandoned—and the four sacks of mail thrown awkwardly over one shoulder, Larry Wilkes huddled at the side of the duckboard

track, thirty yards from Dead Man's Crossroads.

He was waiting for the next salvo to come. Then he was going to make a dash and chance his luck.

Bent there, he thought of little Fletcher lying on the wet blankets, and all that the contents of the jars meant to him.

"Let's hope Jerry gives me a sporting chance to get through," Larry told himself. "Not that he's much of a sportsman, the squareheaded swab! It'll be— Here they come!"

Ough-h-h-h!

Shells from the distant battery split the night with great streaks of orange flame. He heard the murderous, vibrant whine of fragments, and something smacked to the wood almost at his feet. Then he was upright, lurching under the weight of his load as he made for the writhing smoke and the falling earth.

Stumbling, slipping, staggering, he bored on. The duckboards fell away, and he sank ankle deep in the fine dirt. It clogged his footsteps and the rich fumes of explosives reeked in his nostrils. He fought against the dead weight that he carried, and sweated as he struggled furiously on.

He marked the center of the Crossroads through the fading smoke. He saw the track beyond. Then his heart leaped and poised on a pinnacle of dread.

On the air came the sudden, fiercely affrighting, rasping rush of shells dropping close.

He saw them hit the ground near him, striking in spreading founts of earth—a quartet of black death plumes which skated high.

He waited—though he still scrambled on—for the shells to blast him into oblivion.

Nothing happened.

"Duds!" His voice cracked. "All duds. My luck's in!"

He said it again as he stumbled to the duckboards and rushed mail and life saving rum to the company of Royal Wessex in the water logged trenches.

"My luck's in!"

The four dud shells, buried deep in the Ypres mud, were each marked Km-M-3.

BLACKBEARD

by

R. E. ALEXANDER

NED TEACH was whelped in Bristol town, and a jolly young dog was he.
His daddy and buxom mammy kept a snug little groggery,
For heartening all Bristol lads, all sailors home from sea.
Ned's debt of kicks and cuffs was paid by Blackbeard.

Bold Ned once led all Bristol lads among the lasses-O!
He stole a sailor's light-o'-love, the jack tar laid him low.
Ned slit the sailor's weasand, and that night to sea did go.
Many an old salt's debt to Ned was paid by Blackbeard.

Young Ned Teach got a dose of cat for speaking for the crew;
"The hardtack is weevily, sir, the salt-horse stinking, too!"
The bucko skipper glared and bawled, "By God, I'll pickle you!"
Some four-score captains paid his debt to Blackbeard.

It was Ned Teach roused and led us, showed the red weals on his hide.
When the captain bawled for mercy, as the squashed mates squirmed and died,
Ned Teach laughed, and threw him, screaming, to the sharks waiting beside.
Never shark had empty maw that followed Blackbeard.

Oh, naught cared we for law of God or man, or might of Spain,
Of France, of Merrie England, sailing to the Spanish Main,
The Jolly Roger marking us blood brothers all to Cain.
Black hell hounds yapping at the heels of Blackbeard.

"Stand to your guns, my bullies all! Now rake her as she veers!
Out cutlasses! Boarders away! A joe apiece for ears!
Death, death to man and boy, but save the pretty dears!"
So we taught the world the seas were ruled by Blackbeard.

We drank to brave hearts walked the plank, erect and palely still.
We howled at cravens needs must be pricked on, and screaming shrill.
We had such mercy at the end as wolf packs ever will.
But, by God, we *lived*, who sailed the seas with Blackbeard!

'Twas out too greedy eyes that saw as merchantman and prey,
The king's ship played the frightened bird at dawn of that last day.
So clumsily it spread white wings, seemed to flutter away,
We laughed, "Ho! ho! ha! ha!" who summoned Blackbeard.

As Cuffee struck eight bells, we pounced as kestrels would be fed.
The matches fringed Ned Teach's beard spat smoke about his head
That cannoneer reported drunk he struck down dead.
Who wined before they dined answered to Blackbeard.

We luffed ready to rake her, then we'd close and storm aboard.
She dropped that mask had lured us within talon's reach, and poured
Such broadside into us as smashed our stout hull as a gourd.
Hell's gates are slowly swinging wide for Blackbeard.

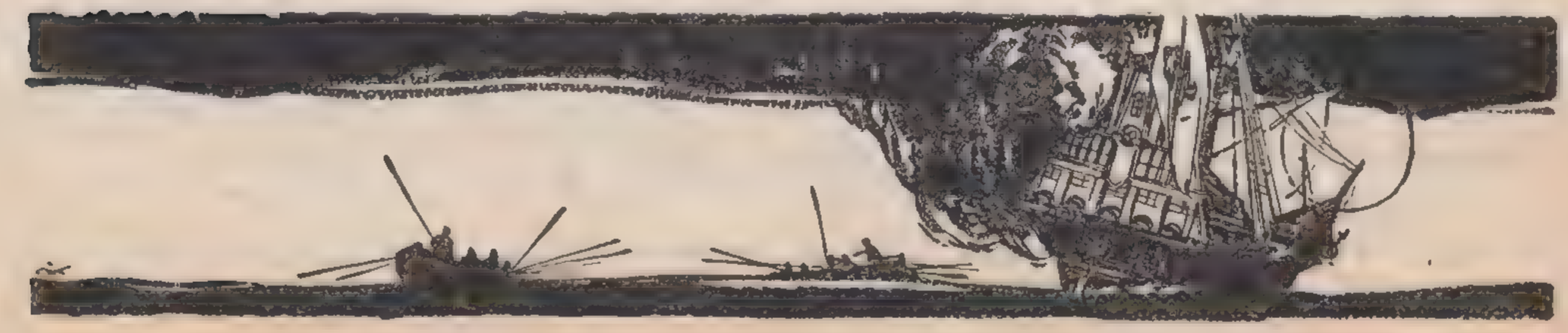
Crash! Smash! We're locked together, and they're pouring overside.
Teach, roaring, leaps to meet Maynard. Their shots go wide.
It's steel to steel and man to man and Ned Teach was our pride.
The first swordsman of the seas was surely Blackbeard.

The bright blades twist and strike as snakes. "Ha! Sa!" they cry.
Carte! Tierce! Cut! Thrust! Parry! One must die.
A spot of blood on Maynard's vest lights flame in Teach's eye.
Surely still his devils keep good watch for Blackbeard.

Teach's great arm is a-wearied, striking at such jackanapes,
Pranced about and danced about, took half a hundred shapes,
Bloody wraiths of victims of old razzias and rapes.
Ah, but they die hard who live and love as Blackbeard.

The half of ours lay dead about, their bandogs' jaws dripped red.
Maynard steps in to make an end, a *coup-de-Jarnac* sped.
His sword clove Teach's heart in twain. They strike off Teach's head.
We had no heart left to fight, who survived Blackbeard.

Bowed down with chains we followed him on but one voyage yet.
His head sate on that king's ship's prow, we floundered in its net.
Tomorrow we would dance in air, a grinning head be set
On a stake beside the sea once ruled by Blackbeard.



VENABLE'S KID

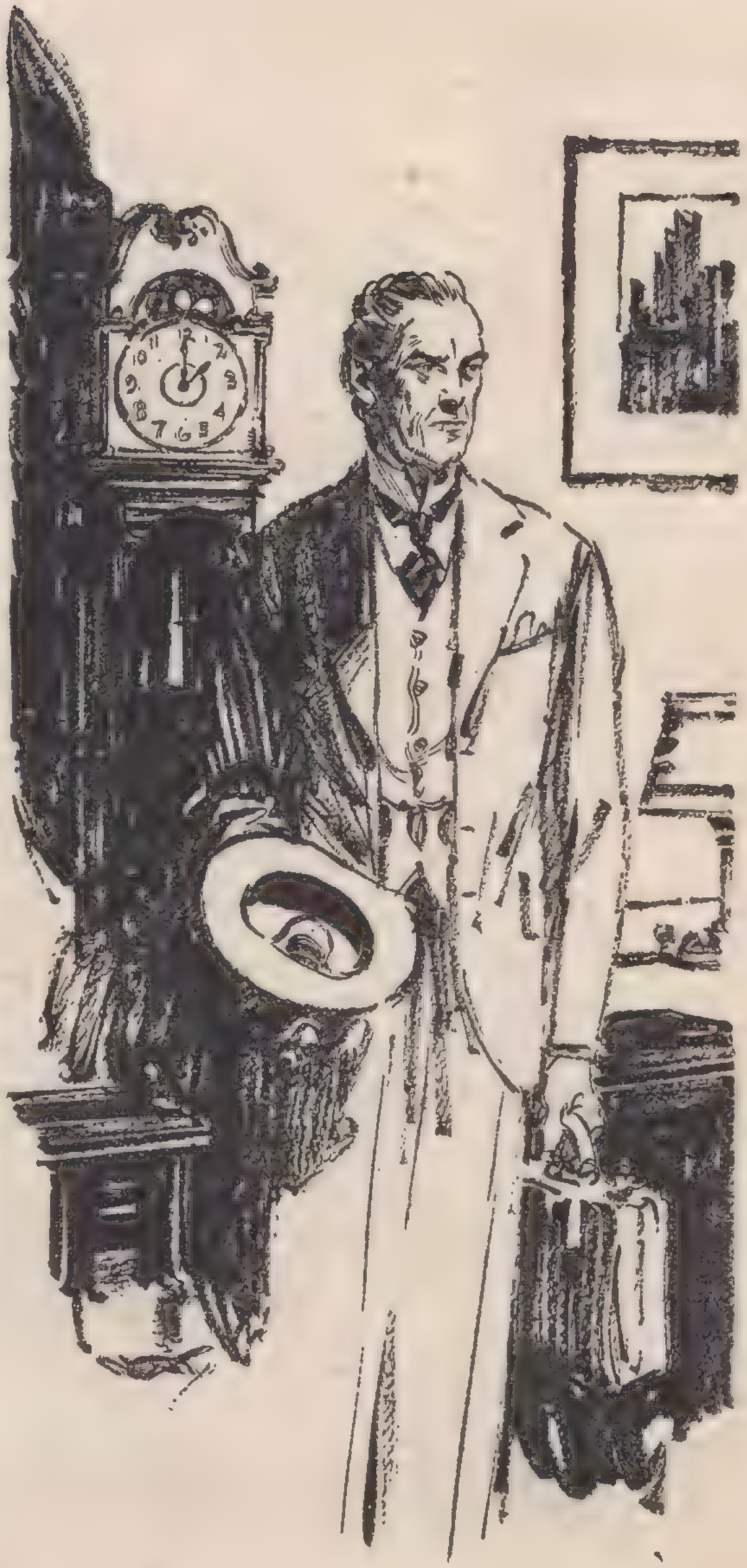
By LOUIS LACY STEVENSON

FERGUSON sat behind the desk in the prison library, the sun slanting through a barred window shining full in his face. Every afternoon since he had been placed in charge of the library he had sat with the sun playing on his features. Every afternoon, until the end of his term, unless he were given another task, he would sit in that same position.

Not because he was the follower of some health cult did he give his features that daily sun bath. He always thought a long way ahead; when he walked through the prison gates wearing a prison made suit, with ten dollars in his pocket and the advice of the warden in his ears, he would take with him no prison pallor.

Despite those bars and the uniform in which he was clad, Ferguson's appearance was not that of a convict. Though he was a third termer, the prison impress was not on him. His bulk overflowed his chair and his face was round and his blue eyes guileless, but about him was a dignity which caused his friends, both inside and outside, to address him as Judge. So long had he been so addressed that occasionally he had to hesitate for a fraction of a second before he remembered that the name he had assumed along with that of Ferguson was Stephen.

About him, also, was something that made him the recipient of confidences of men whose liberty was restrained by steel and stone. That same indefinable quality caused



A Powerful Novelette of Father and Son, and the Shadow of Crime that hung over them

keepers to chat with him almost as if he were one of them. Furthermore, it had enabled him to live luxuriously in those periods when there had been no restrictions on his movements or activities. Nor had it been necessary for him to spend much effort, either physical or mental, to obtain that rich living.

Ferguson detested prison. His world was that of bright lights and laughter; of flashing jewels and pleasing perfumes; of women with hard eyes and soft yielding lips; of music that set the pulses to pounding. He loved the feel of silk against his skin; the ministrations of deft barbers and skilful manicurists; the appearance of nimble footed servitors at the touch of a button. Locked in for the night in a century old cell, he thought of *filet mignons*, broiled live lobsters, fragrant coffee with thick cream and fat, oily cigars with wide gold bands.

Yet Ferguson was a model prisoner. He obeyed every rule not only meticulously but cheerfully. Stir wise, he was. Defiance of authority meant only the cooler, that dark cell with its bread and scanty water, while fractured rules never shortened sentences. Thus, though a third termer, he was librarian with many privileges and had a maximum of good time to his credit.

He looked at the clock. In an hour he would go over to the mess hall, sit on a stool before a bare board table and eat stew. Then he would return to the library where he would remain until nine o'clock,

when he would go to the cell block and be locked in for the night. After the final count he would retire on a straw pallet and cover himself with a coarse blanket. At 6:30 in the morning the gong would ring. He would arise, make up his bed, swing it against the stone wall, fasten it and thus start another day of dull routine. Another twenty-four hours, of the ten years to which he had been sentenced when the victim of a wire tapping scheme had gone to the district attorney, would have elapsed and freedom would be that much nearer.

Those ten years would be the very last. He was through, absolutely through. When he got out he would stay out. Never before had he made such a resolution. Previously he had considered prison as only one of the risks of easy living; suckers were made to be taken; if he did not take them somebody else would. But that third stretch was final; he meant that.

By no means had modern penitentiaries, with yard privileges, games and auditorium entertainments, reformed or rehabilitated him. He still looked on the world as a breeding place for suckers who were to be taken by those wise enough to take them. But—he shifted to get more of the sun—in the future some one else would have to take them; he would square it and go straight.

That he had twenty-five thousand dollars safely laid away had as little bearing on his resolution as did his lack of reformation. To Stephen Ferguson, twenty-five thousand dollars was no fortune. Forty thousand dollars had been the take in that wire tapping scheme; in one Broadway dice game he had seen a quarter of a million change hands; he looked on a grand as only "supper money," though a thousand dollars would buy much food.

No, reformation and that twenty-five thousand dollars did not play a part in his mental state. The cause was entirely different. A man he had never seen was solely responsible for it. That man's name was Baumes; Baumes had fathered certain legislation which had been duly enacted into law by the State of New York and, following the lead of New York, other States had adopted similar legislation. The Baumes laws provided inereasing penalties for those who made law breaking a profession. For those convicted of a felony on four different occasions there was a specific penalty; a mandatory penalty, and that penalty was life imprisonment.

Ferguson, a chill within him, moved slightly as if he were being warmed by getting nearer the sun and as he moved he brushed his fat hand quickly across his eyes. He was trying to eliminate gray ghosts—men in that prison who were doing it all; those whose only egress would be the wagon of the undertaker.

He looked at the clock again. Only five minutes had elapsed since his first glance. With the sun still playing on his features, he started counting his fingers.

Suddenly he stopped. Dividing months into minutes was no occupation for Stephen Ferguson. That kind of business made a man "stir simple." He was stir wise; that was why he was fat. He loathed prison food but he ate all he could get; also he ate what food he could buy and what contraband could be safely smuggled to him. That was as much a part of his system as was sunning himself; when he walked out of prison this time, about him would be no traces of the slim and dapper Stephen Ferguson who had spent so many pleasant afternoons hobnobbing with fellow workers at 42nd Street and old Broadway.

THAT thought so cheered him that he smiled and he was still smiling when the door opened and Kangaroo Morton entered. A big man, with black, straight hair and flashing black eyes, Morton seemed to fill the whole place.

Ferguson did not check his smile; in the years they had served time together, Morton and he had become close friends.

Morton's designation as Kangaroo was obvious; he had come from Australia. He never tried to hide that fact; as if proud

of it, he revealed it to whoever would listen. To Ferguson he had talked so much of Australia that Ferguson could visualize the country. Not only could he visualize it but he had at his tongue's end the idiom of speech and the native terms. He had even gone so far as unconsciously to absorb a dislike for mutton.

Morton talked of Australia generally; of a girl he talked specifically. A quarrel with that girl had sent him out to see the world. When he had reached America, he had received a letter telling him that the girl had relented; if he would only come back to her he would find her waiting. That letter had sent him to prison.

When he received it he had been stranded. Desperately he had tried to get a ship, but no berths could be had. Still more desperate, with an old pistol he had found in a rubbish heap, he had tried to obtain passage money by holding up a grocer. The grocer had battled and in the battle, to Morton's surprise, the old pistol had been discharged, the bullet striking the grocer in the head. The police arrived while Morton had been endeavoring to revive the wounded man. When he had pleaded guilty to a charge of robbery, armed, he had been sentenced to twenty-five years.

Not only did the confinement irk him but he did not bow willingly to authority. Over and over he insisted that though he might be a convict with twenty-five prison years ahead of him he still was a man. He had lost privileges; he had known the cooler. But the canny Ferguson had finally taught him the error of his ways and at last he had been made a trusty.

Morton was the one who painted, repaired and kept in order the scenery used on the auditorium stage; he was the one who operated the motion picture machine. That meant that, like Ferguson, he did not have to be in his cell until nine o'clock at night.

"What's on your mind, Kangaroo?" asked Ferguson.

Morton's black eyes surveyed the entire room in a quick glance.

"Are you alone?" he asked, as if doubting his own powers of observation.

"All alone, Kangaroo. No screws or stools around here—not even a con except you and me."

Morton tensed.

"Listen, Judge," he whispered, his lips scarcely moving. "I'm going out of here."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"Who's with you?"

"Nobody."

"What's your plan?"

"There's a jack on the stage. I can pry apart the bars of the back window with that. It's an easy drop down to the yard. It'll be dark at six. I'll be over the wall with a three-hour start before the final count."

"How about clothes?"

"I found a suit in the property box—a good suit. That suit goes over the wall and I go after it."

"Then what?"

"The train to Montreal; once in Canada I can make my way to the coast and get a ship to Australia—God's country. I got friends out in British Columbia. They'll help me. Let me get to Australia and all the Yankee bulls and keepers can go to hell."

A curious expression came into Ferguson's moon face.

"How do you know she's waiting for you?" he asked.

"I know she's waiting; I know she'd wait the whole twenty-five. That news comes straight to me from down under."

Ferguson looked full into the sun.

"Judge—" began Morton.

"Broke?"

Morton nodded, a slight flush on his face.

Ferguson arose lithely, despite his bulk. Moving noiselessly, he reached the door and flung it open. Seeing that the corridor was empty he went to the book shelves, took down a dusty volume, opened it and removed a twenty-dollar bill.

"How can I get this back to you?"

asked Morton, his eyes meeting Ferguson's.

"You can't. For God's sake don't try."

"Look here, mate, you're white—the whitest I've met in the States. Why don't you make the break with me? There's another suit in the—"

"I'm not going to lam. In two years, counting my short time, I'll walk out of here—I'll walk right out and look every dick in the eye. I'm not taking any chances. Jail breaking's a felony in this State. I'm doing my third stretch. If I go out before my time and I'm picked up, a judge will tell me I'll have to do it all."

"In Australia—"

"I might not get to Australia. It's different with you. You haven't any record and you've got fifteen years hanging around your neck. If I had fifteen left, I might lam; I'm getting old and after fifteen years I'd need goat glands. And you've got a girl waiting for you in Australia."

Morton's hand shot out.

"Good luck, Judge," he said.

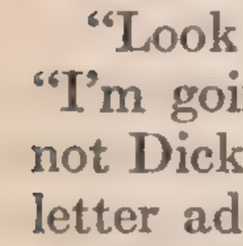
Halfway to the door, he turned back.

"Look here, Judge," he whispered. "I'm going to tell you something. I'm not Dick Morton; I'm Tom Carberry. A letter addressed to Tom Carberry, General Delivery, Sydney, New South Wales, will reach me after I've had time to get there. Write that down somewhere."

"I've got it in here," replied Ferguson, grinning and touching his head. "You'd better be on your way—the P.K.'ll be in here at any minute now."

Morton glided through the door.

Ferguson turned to the record of books issued. Then he again faced the sun. The clock ticked away the minutes loudly.



CUNIFFE, the principal keeper, tall, square, gray featured and gray eyed, entered and, walking to the desk, stood towering over Ferguson.

"Who was just in here?" he asked.

"Clark, the runner from the kitchen," lied Ferguson easily.

"What'd he want?" demanded the keeper, his eyes boring into Ferguson.

"A book," replied Ferguson, blandly.

"What book?"

"Tennyson's poems."

"Tennyson's poems," grunted the keeper. "That little pickpocket reading Tennyson's poems!"

Ferguson pushed the record sheet before the eyes of the keeper.

Cuniffe looked at it intently.

"Get over to the mess hall," he snapped.

"O. K, Dep," replied Ferguson.

Gathering up some books, he stepped to the shelves.

Cuniffe's gaze strayed for a second. A slim volume went under Ferguson's coat.

Out in the sunlight he moved along leisurely toward the mess hall. Two-thirds of the way across the yard, he encountered Clark. Not at all surprised was Ferguson to meet the runner at that point, since he had so timed his movements that the contact had to occur.

As the clothing of the two touched, the slim fingers of the little pickpocket closed over a thin volume which he stowed away in his coat.

Ferguson sighed with relief. He knew Cuniffe; the principal keeper never took anything for granted, not even library records. But he could not dispute Clark's possession of Tennyson's poems.

Seated on the round stool before the bare table, Ferguson ate his plate of stew, also that of Jackson who sat next to him. Jackson had stomach trouble; that was why Ferguson had maneuvered until he had been assigned to the seat beside him. Double rations of prison fare increased weight more rapidly.

His library work at an end for the day, locked up in his cell, Ferguson sat on his narrow bunk and pondered his future. He could not keep Morton out of his mind. Garbed in a suit of clothes which did not differentiate him from other men, more than likely Morton was already aboard the Montreal express. In time he would be in Australia; he would be in Australia with the girl who had waited for him.

Ferguson sighed. In comparison with fifteen, two years seemed a short time. Sitting with a damp cell wall but a short distance from his face, two years seemed like eternity.

Mechanically he stepped to the door for the final count. Again he seated himself, only to be summoned to the door for a second time. He knew what that meant. The count was one short; the absence of Morton had been discovered.

The siren screamed hoarsely.

That mighty din would arouse a whole countryside and turn out those eager to earn a reward of fifty dollars.

Ferguson lay on his bunk and grinned. He had confidence in Morton and felt that he had helped him to defeat the law. Morton would get to Australia and meet that girl.

Ferguson ceased to grin. To him had come the remembrance of the brief time during which he had been Gordon Worthington Venable.

II

GEORGE WASHINGTON VENT, who was to become Stephen Ferguson, then Gordon Worthington Venable only again to change to Stephen Ferguson, was born in a moldy brick tenement on South Halstead Street, Chicago. On the ground floor of the tenement were two saloons and a grocery store which also sold liquor. His father worked in the stockyards and often on Saturday nights had to be carried upstairs. George Washington's mother had borne ten children and he had been the only one who lived. She seemed to be always tired.

One morning, when George Washington was ten years old, she did not awaken. First came a doctor and then two policemen. After the funeral George Washington's father sold the furniture, got drunk on the proceeds, staggered in front of a cable car and was killed.

Thrown on his own resources, George Washington Vent—he despised all three names—began his career by shining shoes, selling newspapers and helping unload wagons. His earnings, together with what milk and bread he could steal from doorsteps, kept him from getting too hungry. Lodging did not worry him—he slept wherever he could find a bit of warmth.

He was well in his teens before he rented a room for two dollars a week on South State Street. Then he did not shine shoes, sell newspapers or unload wagons. Shrewd and observant, he had learned much. Included in his knowledge was the fact that an outsider never had a chance in a three-handed penny matching game; that loaded dice wrecked the law of averages in craps and that the pockets of drunks, sleeping in alleys, often yielded enough to pay room rent several weeks in advance.

Another source of revenue was also his. When men asked him a certain question, if he directed them to houses in which stocky women lived behind drawn curtains, a quarter or a half dollar would be forthcoming. A subsequent call at the place visited by the inquirers brought more revenue. At that stage of his career, he affected pointed toe tan shoes, coats with well padded shoulders and peg top trousers; while on his head, at just a slight angle, rested a derby hat with a somewhat wide brim and low crown. So attired, he frequented the better restaurants—those that charged fifty cents for a meal.

In one of these he met Eaton Sellers. Sellers operated a wheel of fortune with a carnival company which, starting early in the spring, toured the Middle West until late fall. Sellers made Vent a business proposition and Vent accepted the opportunity to travel. No labor was involved. When business grew slack, all Vent had to do was to step forward and bet on a certain number. That number always won. Vent was not allowed to keep his winnings, but he was paid a salary and furnished with food and a place to sleep. Also he could retain such money as he picked up in crap games or through short changing. When he re-

turned to Chicago in the fall he had five hundred dollars.

It was then that he became Stephen Ferguson, his choice of names possibly due to the fact that he was wearing a large gold watch bearing the initials S. F. worked out in small diamonds on the back of the case. He had found that watch in Missouri—in the pocket of the town banker who was too absorbed in the ballyhoo of the "cooch" show to guard his jewelry.

Ferguson did not idle his time away that winter. He formed a connection with a Clark Street gambling house which gave him a cut in the winnings. All he had to do was to pick up victims and steer them to the place, the dealers attending to the rest of the business. During that employment, Ferguson discovered that he had two valuable assets; he could judge men and men accepted him not for what he was, but for what he pretended to be. The second quality he did not utilize at once. The first he did, the very next spring.

Again he went out with the carnival company. But not as a capper. He had a wheel of his own and therefore was a real gimmick worker. He did not carry a capper with him; a capper was not necessary because he could judge men. When business grew slack, he would single out a likely prospect, banter him into playing and allow him to win. To allow him to win was simple, since the wheel responded to Ferguson's slightest whim. If the one so rewarded walked away with his winnings, well and good, since the crowd seeing him receive the money always played heavily. But the winner seldom went away with any of Ferguson's money. Almost always he not only lost his winnings, but whatever he had with him. As was said, Ferguson was a judge of men.

Despite his success, it did not take Ferguson long to outgrow the carnival. There were certain features about it he did not like. The entire company ate in a mess tent; the whole company slept in tents. Then there were occasional unpleasant episodes, such as losers appealing to partisan marshals who threatened arrest and had to be silenced with money. In Iowa, one of Ferguson's victims, who had lost six hundred dollars, which happened to be his return for an entire season's work in the cornfields, had come back with other indignant and muscular soil tillers. Not only had they wrecked Ferguson's wheel, but Ferguson spent two weeks in bed, and limped when he rejoined the company.

BACK in Chicago again, he resumed his gambling connections. The town was wide open. Much money passed through his hands. He learned the taste of lobster à la Newberg and to like caviar. He acquired silk underwear and a wardrobe of well tailored clothes. From contacts with patrons, he picked up a superficial polish which enabled him to meet all men easily. From other contacts, he enlarged the education he had begun in Chicago's streets; that is, he learned new ways of taking suckers.

He heard much of New York and what he heard of New York appealed to him greatly. New York offered far more of what he considered the finer things of life than did Chicago.

Times changed in Chicago. Things tightened up. The wide open town disappeared. Gambling turned furtive and unprofitable. The stream of gold that had flowed to Ferguson dwindled to a trickle. When that occurred he bought a ticket for New York.

In New York, he capitalized the confidence other men had in him. He did it by selling gold mine stock. Before the eyes of prospects he flashed untold wealth. That wealth was mere words, but those whom he approached did not see it that way. Not only did those he looked on as suckers, or as poor fish, have confidence in him, but so did those who were also engaged in taking suckers.

Through those acquaintances, he obtained an introduction to the world of light and laughter; flashing jewels and pleasant perfumes; women with hard eyes

and soft yielding lips; music that set the pulses to pounding.

Fifth Avenue tailors made his clothes; deft barbers worked on his face and skilful manicurists on his hands. In an expensive Broadway hotel, nimble footed servitors appeared at the touch of a button.

He lived the life of which he had dreamed in Chicago; he lived the life he had come to New York to find. He could afford to take his fill of all such pleasures; except for the cost of having engraved those alluring gold mine stock certificates, he had no other outlay. Selling them was merely an incident.

Another incident was far more disagreeable. One afternoon a middle aged man wearing square toed shoes stepped up to Ferguson and invited him to go down to police headquarters. Ferguson demurred; he had no business at police headquarters. The stranger flashed a gold badge and informed Ferguson that if he did not go peaceably, he would be taken. He said it as if he meant it and Ferguson went.

From headquarters Ferguson rode over to the Tombs. Next, the Grand Jury handed up certain indictments. Followed, on Ferguson's part, heavy expenditures for bail and still more heavy expenditures for attorneys. All those expenditures did him no good whatsoever. The State had more witnesses than it could use. On advice of counsel, Ferguson pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two years in Sing Sing.

Not until the cell door closed on him did Ferguson realize what had happened. In a cotton uniform, with stripes running around his body and his hair cut so close to his head he looked as if it had been shaved, with that bolt shooting home and steel bars between him and the sunlight, he knew he was a convict. That night was the longest of his life.

For three months he went about as one in a daze. Nothing was real, nothing concrete—not even shoveling coal in the reception company or working in the tailor shop. In him always burned the fear of breaking some rule. Every day he saw men yanked from the line and sent to the principal keeper for punishment.

At the end of three months he had his feet on the ground. Then he was stir wise and, in little more than a year, he walked out of the prison a free man. Mentally he tried to speed the train from Ossining to New York.

His stay in New York, however, was extremely brief. Again acting on advice of counsel, he left within a few hours after his arrival. He could still be picked up on those other indictments and other victims were waiting to testify. Having several hundred dollars in his possession, he went into seclusion some distance from Broadway until his hair grew out and the prison pallor vanished.

As Gordon Worthington Venable, he obtained a position with a legitimate bond house in Detroit, obliging Broadway acquaintances having supplied him with the necessary credentials. Selling legitimate bonds was far harder work than selling fake gold mine stock, and the returns were much smaller. But it was employment that did not turn the eyes of the law in his direction. After all, he believed, it was only a brief interlude. In time, he would go back to New York. He never thought of returning to Chicago; he had outgrown Chicago just as he had outgrown the carnival.

MONTHS passed. Advices from New York still informed him that it was unsafe for him to return. Detroit, with its tree lined streets and its two hundred thousand-odd inhabitants, was a pleasant town. But it did not suit Gordon Worthington Venable. Constantly within him was the itch to get back to that world he had been forced to leave. As a bond salesman in Detroit, the only luxury his income afforded him was an occasional frog-fish-and-chicken dinner.

Just at a time when he felt as if to live another week in a furnished room on Cass Avenue would drive him mad, he met Katherine Bradley. She was tall, dark and handsome and with an appealing look

in her brown eyes. Only twenty she was, but self-supporting and self-reliant.

In the life of Stephen Ferguson had been many women. But she was the first girl. She made even that furnished room at least tolerable. An evening at Belle Isle with her was better than the best cabaret he had ever known. He threw himself into the bond business with renewed zeal that he might take her to dinner more often at the Belle Isle Casino.

They met in June and were married in December. By using all of his powers, Venable had earned enough to buy a cottage on the East Side. With his wife installed in that cottage, Gordon Venable forgot all about Broadway and Stephen Ferguson of Chicago, Broadway and Sing Sing. He concentrated on his home and bond selling. In no great time he was the star salesman of the company and had four thousand dollars in a joint account with his wife in the bank.

At the end of a year, however, his eagerness to get home early seemed to die down. Often he stopped for a few glasses of beer with friends before taking the long trolley ride. He preferred champagne, but though the star salesman, he could not afford it. Nor could he afford caviar, tailored suits and silk underwear. In addition, his free time was not his own but belonged to his wife.

At home, not infrequently, he sat staring at the wall.

"What are you thinking about, Gordon?" his wife asked one evening.

"Nothing," he replied hastily.

"Business?" she persisted.

"Yes, business."

He lied; in his eyes was the flash of jewels; in his ears, music that made the pulses pound.

On the second anniversary of his marriage he became the father of a son.

"He looks just like you," declared the mother.

Venable did not say no, but to him the baby resembled a small red monkey.

"His name will be Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr," continued the mother. And the child was so christened.

Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. was a month old when Gordon Worthington Venable received a registered letter from New York. After he had read it three times he went up to the office of Horace W. Biddle, the manager of his company.

"I'm tendering my resignation to take effect at once," said Ferguson.

"Why?" asked the manager, newly appointed and eager to keep his best man. "Not going with some other house, are you?"

"No," replied Ferguson. "I'm through with the bond business. I have a chance to get into another line in Chicago and I think I'd better take it."

Biddle argued, but Venable remained firm. In the end, after he had extracted a promise that should Venable return to Detroit he would give him first option on his services, Biddle gave him a five hundred dollar bonus. As Venable had a thousand dollars commission coming, he did not go to the bank. It was after banking hours anyway and he was in a hurry.

"I have to go to Chicago on business, Kate," he told his wife. "I want to catch the six o'clock train. I'll have to use speed if I get it."

She helped him pack.

The next morning he arrived in New York.

Just outside Grand Central Terminal he noticed a chunky young man who seemed to be much interested in him. Venable's eyes dropped to the shoes of the stranger. Immediately, despite himself, he walked faster, in him the remembrance of the square toes of the detective who had started him on his journey to Sing Sing.

A little later, with friends in the Knickerbocker Bar, while old King Cole beamed benignly on the group, he discussed the encounter at the station. His friends agreed that while, as they had notified him in the registered letter, the indictments had been quashed, it might be well not to make himself too prominent for awhile at least.

FOR THE next few days Venable wandered here and there in the Times Square district. In the Metropole, he met Jack Fisher. The last time he had seen Fisher had been the day he had left Sing Sing. But Fisher looked prosperous, though he had squared it, he said.

"Are you working?" asked Venable.

"No, playing the market," replied Fisher. "I'm not a grifter any more. I'm a respectable trader—I'm in Wall Street. I've got a lady friend—the wife of a broker who's in the know—and she hands me hot ones. Here's a good buy for tomorrow."

Fisher gave Venable the name of a stock, also the name of a broker, but not the husband of his lady friend.

In the morning Venable went down to Wall Street. The fever of the district got into his veins. He margined a thousand dollars on the stock Fisher had named. At the close of the day he was a thousand dollars richer.

He met Fisher again that evening. Just before the Stock Exchange opened the next day he was in Wall Street. But he never reached the office of his broker.

At New Street a heavy hand rested on his shoulder.

"You don't belong down here, Steve Ferguson," said a voice in his ear. "Come on over to headquarters."

Twenty-four hours later, the police department having been unable to find anything other than those quashed indictments, Ferguson—he had judged it just as well to drop the name of Venable since certain permanent records, including fingerprints, made him Ferguson—was released.

In those twenty-four hours many things had happened in Wall Street. Order had been succeeded by chaos. Men, who had been wealthy when Ferguson had been taken into custody for going below the deadline, were paupers. Fisher had left the city because he had been unable to meet his hotel bill. Ferguson stowed away his Wall Street winnings in a safe place.

In a month he was selling oil stocks. The company that paid him a commission of fifty per cent. actually owned land in Oklahoma; and three geologists, whose pictures adorned the company's literature, gave their opinion under oath that on that land were oil deposits of surpassing richness.

New York seemed eager for oil stocks, the automobile having given crude oil a new importance. Ferguson reaped a harvest. Instead of having to search for prospects, they came to him, his patrons sending their friends. He moved to better and better hotels; his wardrobe increased in size and excellence; only silk touched his skin and his champagne taste improved so that he could tell a vintage by sipping it.

Finding an uptown broker's office, whenever he had a good tip he played the stock market. Often he won. He might have taken far larger profits but for the fact that he never played any of his oil commissions. Always that which he margined was the return from the only honest money he had earned since he had quit peddling papers. Superstition was deeply ingrained within him.

He never sent any of his oil or Wall Street profits to Detroit, however. So far as he was concerned, Gordon Worthington Venable was dead and Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. had never been born. Whenever he thought of those months of married life, which was seldom, he held they were comparable only to the months he had spent up the river.

At the very height of Ferguson's prosperity, when he was able to call every important head waiter by his first name and was always assured of a choice table, some of the oil investors got together and sent an investigating committee down to Oklahoma. That committee came back with a report that if there was any oil on their property, it had been brought there in tank wagons. As for the three geologists who had been so sure of the presence of petroleum, they were not known in the oilfields or anywhere else, so far as the committee could learn.

The investors decided not to make the report public; they had the committee take it to the district attorney. The district attorney, a candidate for another term, listened with deep interest, then escorted the committee to the grand jury. The grand jury acted and a detective arrested Ferguson.

Again Ferguson spent much money. Some of his friends took a plea, but he stood trial. The jury remained out only about long enough to enjoy a smoke and brought in a verdict of guilty. Ferguson went up the river for five years.

Sing Sing had changed. The old lockstep and striped uniform had been abolished and supper was served in the mess hall, instead of convicts taking bread to their cells. But it was still Sing Sing and, being Sing Sing, was very much a prison. The prison detesting Ferguson, however, was stir wise and within three years went back to Broadway.

NOT immediately did he return to the night world he loved. His finances were too low for that. He had fifteen thousand dollars of Wall Street money well salted away, but his superstition kept him from using those funds. In Sing Sing he had acquired the belief which had grown into a conviction that some day his Wall Street money would stave off disaster.

Nor did he consider the oil stock business. He had been sent to prison for selling gold mine stocks; he had done a stretch for selling oil stocks. Prison was only one of the risks of easy living, but if risks had to be taken, they should be taken only for big stakes.

New York was full of suckers; he had proved that. Suckers were made to be taken. The only excuse a sucker had for being born was so that some one wise enough to do so could take him. No more time or energy was needed to take a sucker than to sell a profitable block of phony stock, and the returns were hundreds of times greater. Ferguson had gone over that time and time again when, locked in his old cell, with prison fare heavy in his stomach, he had sniffed the odor of thick beefsteaks and Havana tobacco.

With his dignity, which caused acquaintances to call him Judge, with that something about him that caused men to give him their confidence and with that same something that caused men of all classes to treat him as an equal, Ferguson was admirably equipped for taking suckers. Also he had had much training. As soon as he got himself oriented, he employed all of his qualities and talents.

The plans for the wire tapping plant had been laid with the utmost care since the stake was the largest for which Ferguson had ever played. The sucker, a Middle Western merchant, had been built up until he was fairly tumbling over himself for action. He got it—at an expenditure of a hundred thousand dollars.

Morally, that sucker was as guilty as those who had taken him. But despite that fact, he went to the district attorney and the district attorney, absolving him of all guilt, procured an indictment.

Ferguson did not take his arrest seriously at first. By that time, arrests were an old story. His cut in the wire tapping racket had been forty thousand dollars. With forty grand, particularly if it were placed properly, a wise guy could accomplish much.

When the forty thousand dollars had vanished except for a few stray twenties and tens, Ferguson saw that his expenditures had been in vain. The case was so dead open and shut that he could not beat the rap. As, while taking suckers, he had continued his Wall Street speculations, he had run his winnings up to twenty-five thousand; but he did not care to send that money after the forty thousand. So he took a plea and was sentenced to ten years.

It was strange, Ferguson thought, while the siren was screaming the escape of Dick Morton, that his mind should turn to a complete review of the past. But there was a girl in the life of Tom Carberry, who had become Dick Morton, and there had been one girl in the life of George Washington Vent, who had become

Stephen Ferguson, then Gordon Worthington Venable and as Stephen Ferguson was listening to a siren calling volunteers to a man hunt.

The deep throated whistle ceased its din. Only the tramp of an unusually alert screw could be heard.

Ferguson tried to go to sleep. After all, two years were not so long. His hair was graying but he was still young. At the end of those two years would be Broadway.

His eyes flashed wide open.

No, not Broadway; Broadway was out. He was going straight; he could not go straight on Broadway; Broadway on its way to Albany wandered from the straight path, just as did those who lived on that meandering thoroughfare.

Swiftly his mind veered back to the time when he had been Gordon Worthington Venable.

"I wonder if my kid does look like me by this time?" he asked himself.

Then he went to sleep.

III

FERGUSON stood in the office of the warden, his fat body covered with a suit fresh from the prison tailor shop, prison shoes on his feet, in his pockets compensation earned at the rate of a half cent a day and the ten dollars which the State of New York gives to a discharged convict as a new start in life. Before Ferguson's eyes was the vision of a million dollars; at least a million dollars; possibly more than a million dollars.

"Go straight from now on, Ferguson," advised the warden. "One more slip and you're through. The judge won't be allowed any discretion; he will have to sentence you to life if you commit another felony, no matter how insignificant. But I don't need to tell you that."

"You don't need to tell me that, Warden," returned Ferguson earnestly. "I know all about the Baumes laws. I'll never make another slip."

"Ferguson, you have plenty of brains; the trouble with you is that you haven't used them right. See that you do use them right in the future. You owe that much to yourself, at least, if not to society."

"Thanks, Warden. I'll use what few brains I may happen to have, and I'll use them right. I've been doing a lot of thinking in here. I have seen all of my mistakes. I've mapped out a new course for myself and I've got guts enough to follow it."

His blue eyes met the searching eyes of the warden steadily.

"It's in you," declared the official slowly. "I've been watching you ever since you came back. In all that time, there had been only one thing against you and that was never proved."

"Morton's escape?" asked Ferguson, still with his eyes meeting the warden's.

"Morton is one of the very few who have succeeded in leaving here permanently before their time was up. And Cuniffe—"

"The P. K. thought Morton was in the library that afternoon."

"He still thinks so."

"He found those poems on Clark, didn't he? And didn't Clark testify—"

"Cuniffe isn't convinced."

"He's a damned hard guy to convince. But when I go through that door, he'll never worry me again."

"You're lucky you didn't lose any of your good time, Ferguson," replied the warden with a smile. "Remember your promise and if I ever can help, I'll be glad to be of service. Goodby and good luck."

"Goodby, Warden," answered Ferguson, waddling toward the door, that vision of a million still brighter.

He reached the station just in time to take the train for New York. But when the train pulled in, he paid no attention to it, merely sitting with his face buried in a newspaper. The Albany train arrived and his absorption in the news of the day continued. But when that train started, he was in the parlor car.

When he had told the warden that he had done a lot of thinking and had mapped

out a new course for himself, he had spoken the exact truth. That thinking had made firm his resolution to go straight. To rot in prison for the rest of his life was not to be his fate. He was entirely too wise for that. As he had informed the warden, he had seen all of his errors and he would not repeat them. Still, in the end, he would have more money than he had ever before possessed.

With that money he would again be a part of the world he loved. Several years would elapse before he would again know flashing jewels, women with hard eyes and soft yielding lips and music that set the pulses to pounding; but the wait would be worth while. He was forty-six years old; but as ages went in modern times, that was not old. There would still be years in which to enjoy that wealth. Those last two years in prison had instilled within him a mighty patience, since they had been long years; years especially long after the investigation of the escape of Dick Morton had ended. It had been during that investigation, with Cuniffe trying his best to trap Ferguson into an admission that Morton and he had discussed Morton's escape, that that magnificent plan with a million or more as its stake had occurred to Ferguson.

Hours when he had sat with the sun streaming into his face, he had polished and repolished that plan; had polished and repolished it until it gleamed as bright as hope itself. Night after night, locked in a cell hardly more than a slit in stone, toward that prized plan he had taken a hostile attitude and sought to find flaws in it. With the care of an earnest medical student at work on a cadaver, he had dissected it from beginning to end. Long before time for his release he had so perfected it that he had eliminated all elements of risk—that is, all elements of risk so far as he was concerned, and he held that only his own safety mattered.

Though he had financed Dick Morton's escape, he was in Morton's debt. It was his firm belief that Morton had reached Australia and become Tom Carberry. He had not heard from Tom Carberry. But that did not shake his faith. He had made Morton stir wise; Carberry would heed the lessons learned by Morton. A letter would have borne a postmark; that postmark would have been Australia and Morton had talked unendingly of Australia.

In the life of Tom Carberry there was a girl; in the life of Gordon Worthington Venable there had been one girl. Because of that one girl, Ferguson, his memory awakened by the girl awaiting Carberry, had been able to plan his new life, that new life in which was to figure a million dollars. When he had entered on that new life he could hear from Carberry with perfect safety.

AS THE train sped along the Hudson River, Ferguson kept thinking of his plan inasmuch as plans hatched within prison walls often have a far different aspect when open spaces have taken the place of those walls. But to Ferguson, his plan looked just the same outside as it had inside; just as practical and with just as much certainty of a reward of a million dollars.

In Albany he left the train and called a number from a station telephone. After a brief conversation, he hailed a taxicab and rode to the outskirts of the State capital. Dismissing the taxi on a corner, he walked two blocks, stopped at an inconspicuous dwelling and rapped twice. After counting seven slowly, he gave two more knocks.

Jack Fisher opened the door and Ferguson oozed inside quickly. Fisher, though he said he no longer traded in Wall Street, looked very prosperous. He had a good racket, he explained; when the Assembly was in session, he ran a stud game.

"How long will you be here?" he asked Ferguson.

"Until your tailor makes me a couple of new suits," replied Ferguson, lighting the cigar Fisher handed him.

"I'll telephone him; he'll be out here in half an hour."

"He won't get any advertising from this

job—I want special labels in the pockets of these clothes."

"What kind of labels?"

"The best tailor in Sydney, Australia. I don't know his name."

"Tony'll attend to that—he has New York connections. I've had my chef fix up a *filet mignon* for you. You see, I remember your tastes."

"God!" ejaculated Ferguson, looking as if he were about to drool.

Two days later, wearing excellently tailored clothes, with more in a new suit case, Ferguson took the night boat for New York. In the morning he disembarked at 125th Street. Broadway, with the subway running above it at that point, was only a few blocks away. But he instructed the taxicab chauffeur to follow Riverside Drive to 72nd Street and when he reached that point, told him to go on down West End Avenue to 59th Street, then down Tenth Avenue to 14th Street. There he dismissed the cab.

Near 14th Street he visited the engraving plant that had turned out the gold mine stock certificates for him. He placed only a small order, but paid a bonus for quick work. When he departed he took with him a hundred cards engraved with the name, Gordon Worthington Venable.

Hailing a cab, he ordered the driver to take him to a Fifth Avenue address, well uptown.

"Follow the Avenue all the way," he said.

At Madison Square he shrank back into the shadows of the cab. For a few seconds he was actually on Broadway, that meandering street crossing the Avenue at that point. It was not the Broadway of bright lights, but Broadway, nevertheless.

His destination was a jewelry store which specialized in imported goods. There he asked for a silver cigaret case made in Australia. None was to be had, so he compromised on one made in England. He did the same with an expensive gold watch. Both purchases were contingent, however, on the case and watch being engraved immediately with the monogram GWV.

"I'll be back in half an hour," said Ferguson. "If that engraving isn't done when I return, the deal's off."

"It will be done," promised the clerk.

In a smart haberdashery a short distance away, Ferguson bought silk underwear, hose and fine shirts, also handkerchiefs bearing the initial V and suspenders—the clerk called the latter braces. All his purchases were imports from England, there being no Australian goods on sale. When he returned to the jeweler's, he found his cigaret case and watch ready.

Once more a taxicab passenger, he felt the pangs of hunger. In the immediate neighborhood was a restaurant which, he knew from much experience, served food to his liking. But that restaurant was on Broadway and he did not dare risk Broadway. Again before his eyes came the vision of a million dollars.

He dined in a dingy café well downtown. His luncheon concluded, he took a long walk. When he got into a taxicab again, he had with him, in addition to his suitcase, a small black grip. That grip he kept on the seat beside him with his hand through the handle. It contained twenty-five thousand dollars. The time had come when he was to begin to expend the profits Wall Street had returned him on the only honest money he had ever earned.

The first purchase made from that money was a money order which he sent to Jack Fisher. It more than covered what Fisher had spent in his behalf and what funds Fisher had advanced when Ferguson had left Albany for New York. Fisher had assured him that he owed him nothing; that he was glad to help a man who had been up against it and that his gambling profits were such that he did not need the money. But Ferguson wanted no such an obligation hanging over him in the new life he was about to enter.

As he taxied down toward the pier to take the Boston boat, he felt the character of Ferguson slipping from him and that of Gordon Worthington Venable taking its place. In his new life he would once more be Gordon Worthington Venable; never again would he be anything

else but Gordon Worthington Venable.

Still, about him were traces of Stephen Ferguson. To reach the destination he had in mind, he might have boarded a train at Grand Central station instead of in Boston. That would have saved him both time and money. But he remembered that when he had come back to New York from Detroit, a detective had watched him as he left that station. That morning, he had been slender and dapper. Now he was fat and portly. Also about him were no traces of prison pallor and his hair was just as long as that of other men. Still, he could take no chances since before his eyes was the vision of a million dollars —at least a million dollars.

IV

THE TRAIN stopped in Windsor to change from a steam to the electric locomotive that would drag it under the Detroit River. The porter gathered up Venable's suitcase. He would carry the small black bag himself. The porter grinned and Venable knew he suspected him of carrying liquor. But there was no liquor in that bag. It contained too many packages of currency to leave room for even one bottle.

From the time he had awakened Venable had been thinking about the son he had left behind in Detroit. As he had had access to newspapers in prison, he knew that Detroit had changed from a pleasant little community of two hundred thousand or so with a few stove factories as its chief industries, to a metropolis of a million or more inhabitants. Vitally interested was he in the fact that Detroit had become the "Motor City". The more residents and the busier the city, the less chance of Gordon Worthington Venable's ever being connected with Stephen Ferguson.

A question came into his mind as to what bearing those changes had had on the life of his son. In the twenty years that had elapsed since he had last seen the infant who, to him, had looked like a little red monkey, many things might have happened. Many things might have happened to the woman he had married, also, but to her he gave little consideration. She might have obtained a divorce on the grounds of desertion and married again; she might even be dead. But that did not matter. Still his wife, the wife of another man or sleeping beneath the grass, she did not count, since whatever had occurred to her, his son was his son and it was for the reunion with his son that Gordon Worthington Venable was going back to Detroit.

"I wonder if my kid does look like me?" he asked himself, just as he had asked himself that same question behind the gray walls of Sing Sing.

In the narrow mirror beside the Pullman window he surveyed his features intently. His face was fat, but not unpleasantly so; the fat was that of good living attendant on prosperity. Also, his face was fat enough to alter the features of Stephen Ferguson. He was satisfied utterly; for such he had striven. Furthermore, his face was tanned, and the faces of men fresh from prison more often than not were pale.

But as he looked at himself, for some reason or other, a question came to him, a question far more depressing than the sudden shadow that followed the plunge of the train into the tunnel under the river. It was a question that never had entered his mind before, though its answer was vital to the success of the plan he had polished and repolished and had dissected with such elaborate care that he might find and eliminate any flaws.

That question was whether or not his son had survived the vicissitudes of infancy and the dangers of adolescence and grown into young manhood. If he had not, then the attainment of a million dollars without risk of spending the rest of his life in prison seemed remote indeed to Gordon Worthington Venable, so remote that the Pullman seat became too uncomfortable for occupancy and he stood in the aisle, though the train was only midway through the tunnel and other travelers were still sitting.

Outwardly, however, he was perfectly composed; he had to be though he burned

with self-recrimination for having overlooked, in his scheming, such a vital point. That he had done so disquieted him greatly since always previously his thinking ahead had been all embracing in detail. More nonsensical such a lapse appeared to him, inasmuch as with his connections it would have been easy for him to have learned, with no risk whatsoever, whether or not Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. lived, and whether or not he still lived in Detroit.

Nevertheless, Venable walked from the train, tipped the porter and strode as leisurely up the long ramp of the Michigan Central station as if he had nothing more important on his mind than the keeping of business appointments. He retained that same indifference when, as he approached the exit, he saw standing at the rope an individual who, to his sharpened senses, did not look as if he were merely awaiting the arrival of friends or relatives. Indubitably, that person was a representative of the law stationed there to sort from the incomers those who would bear watching.

Because of experience, having pictured just such an encounter, Venable did not drop his eyes, avert his face or quicken his step, since any of those things would have directed attention his way; besides, he was Gordon Worthington Venable, who knew officers not as enemies to be outwitted, but as guardians of society. He even welcomed the test, since passing it gave him more assurance and placed him more firmly in character.

Boldly, he passed through the station to the taxicab stand. At Griswold Street he dismissed the cab and walked around the City Hall, which looked to him like a piece of coke dropped in the midst of office buildings. On the Woodward Avenue side he halted a cruising taxicab and ordered the driver to take him to the East Side with all possible speed. In him was a vast impatience because he believed that the answer to that persistent question lay at the end of his ride.

It did not, however. Where had stood the cottage in which his son had been born was an apartment house. Neighboring cottages where he might have acquired information were gone also, as the growth of Detroit had included that entire section.

WITH a feeling of heaviness about his heart, Venable made inquiries, not seeking to dissemble his interest in the slightest. In fact, he emphasized it; to all of those of whom he inquired, he laid stress on the importance of his quest. He had been gone a long time, he said, and was burning with eagerness for a reunion with his wife and son. But nóne in the neighborhood knew of the existence of Katherine Venable; of Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. Those apartments had been built within the last three years; the residents were comparatively new in the neighborhood. Mentally cursing his luck, Venable went here and there only to acknowledge himself defeated at last. Instead of helping him, the growth of Detroit had proved an obstacle.

But though he had omitted one vital factor from his scheming, Venable's mind was alert. He went back downtown and registered at a quiet but good hotel. There he consulted the telephone book and the city directory. But the name Venable did not appear. Still resourceful, he went to the legitimate bond house where he had been the star salesman and asked for Horace W. Biddle, office manager.

"He ain't office manager no more," said the boy at the gate. "He's the president —the whole works."

"Take in my card," ordered Venable.

"Have you got an appointment? If you haven't—" began the boy.

Something in Venable's face stopped him.

"I'll see what I can do for you," he mumbled, hurrying through an inner door.

"Mr. Biddle'll see you in ten minutes," said the boy on his return.

"I'll wait," replied Venable.

He waited a half-hour before he was summoned, and when he was admitted to Biddle's presence the man who had urged him to give him first option on his services

should he ever return to Detroit, did not seem to be cordial.

"I'm not after my old job," said Venable, in the accents of Dick Morton. "I don't need a job; I've struck it rich in Australia."

"Australia?" asked Biddle dryly.

"Yes, Australia. I might as well make a clean breast of this whole affair, Mr. Biddle."

"You might."

"Yes. You remember when I left, I told you I was going to Chicago to take up a better proposition?"

"That was twenty years ago," said Biddle, nodding.

"Twenty years ago. It didn't materialize. I didn't want to confess defeat, so instead of returning, I went on to San Francisco because, in Chicago, I learned of a prospect there. That one didn't pan out either. I was running short of funds and I grew despondent. I'll omit a lot of details. One night I got drunk in a waterfront saloon.

"When I awakened, I was aboard a sailing ship. The captain, a big, black whiskered brute, kicked me out on deck. Then I knew that I had been shanghaied. It wasn't for a day or two though that I found out we were on our way to Australia. I thought of my wife and son—"

Venable stopped, choking; Biddle coughed.

"My situation almost drove me crazy; but there was nothing I could do about it. Again I omit details—brutal treatment, rotten food and the like of that. At last, when I was only skin and bones, we reached Australia. That night I jumped overboard and swam ashore. I didn't have a shilling in my pocket; I couldn't cable my wife. I couldn't even write her.

"I tried to get a ship—any ship. But no hands were needed. Maybe I became a little crazy. I don't know. The next thing I did know, I was out herding sheep. Mutton! My God, it makes me sick to think of mutton even now.

"Finally I picked up a mate and went prospecting. After a long search, Tom Carberry and I struck gold. As soon as I could sell my share of the mine and arrange my affairs, I came back to the States, my wife and my son in my mind. I arrived this morning. I couldn't find them; they have both disappeared, so I've come to you for help."

Biddle stopped drawing foolish figures on his desk blotter.

"You received wages for sheep herding, didn't you?" he asked.

"I did—but they wouldn't be called that in the States."

"Why didn't you try to communicate with your wife?"

"I did; I cabled her with my first pay. I walked in from the bush to the cable office. And that same day, I mailed four letters. I calculated the time it would take a letter to get back from the States. When the ship came in, I was at the post. Every time a ship was due, I walked to town. But never a letter.

"I tried to save up money enough to come back home, but I couldn't; the work wasn't steady enough. I kept on writing. Months changed to years and I didn't hear from her. At last I quit writing. I thought—"

Venable covered his face with his hands and his shoulders shook.

"Your wife is dead," said Biddle, speaking as if he wished he did not have to impart such news. "She died two years ago."

A sob escaped Venable.

"But your son—" Biddle placed his hand on Venable's shoulders—"is still alive, and he's a fine boy."

"My kid!" cried Venable. "My kid's alive! Where is he? Call a taxi!"

"Your son is working in a hardware store out on Mack Avenue. My car is downstairs; I'll have my chauffeur drive you."

Biddle assisted Venable to his feet. Venable, with tears in his eyes, thanked him and gripped his hand hard.

They were real tears; real tears of relief. The question had been answered to Venable's complete satisfaction. The death of his wife merely made matters a little less complicated. Not much, though. The astute Biddle had accepted his story;

she would have done the same. But still, with her gone, he could concentrate on his son and that would be better.

"I'd ought to have gone on the stage," said Venable to himself. "I'm an actor—a million dollar actor."

V

WITH every bit of skill, adroitness, personality and persuasion at his command, Venable endeavored to sell himself to his son. Never had he used all of his talents in such a manner in handling a sucker. Still, never before had he tried to make a million dollar sale.

That Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. despite his youth, lack of experience and distaste for the hardware business, should prove an extremely hard prospect, instead of discouraging Venable, pleased him greatly; it proved to him that his kid was no sucker; that his kid had brains even as his father had brains.

Except for the brown of his eyes, the boy had none of the physical characteristics of his mother. In all other ways he was like his father, especially in the formation of his brow and his chin. Now and then on his face, Venable, always watching him intently, detected an expression that he knew had been his in the days of his youth before taking suckers and stir years had taught him to keep emotions out of his face except when he had need of them for some specific purpose. His height was about the same as that of Venable, and he had the same rather pudgy and strong hands. Indeed, Venable saw Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. as George Washington Vent just starting out with a carnival company.

Nevertheless, he could not get close to the boy though he tried every angle of approach he could imagine. When he had come into the Mack Avenue hardware store and announced himself as the parent who had disappeared when his son was a baby, the boy had received the news calmly. Then he had telephoned to Biddle for confirmation and, when it had been supplied, accepted his father quite plainly with reservations.

To the boy Venable told the story he had told to Biddle, only with a far greater wealth of detail and with much more stress on the awfulness of his predicament. He talked of nights with hot winds blowing and the stars gleaming down as hard as if they were steel bits; stars which seemed to stab right into his aching heart. He lay awake with those stars stabbing him until exhaustion brought sleep. But only briefly did he sleep, for visions of his wife and little boy would come to him and his eyes would fly open and once more gaze into those hard stars.

He used the accent of Dick Morton in his conversation and, as he talked, with an innocent gesture he extended the English cigaret case toward his son and urged him to have one. The boy refused and then, as if interested in the time, Venable consulted the watch that had been made in England, replacing it in his pocket hurriedly, but not until he was sure his son had seen the hallmark.

After he had induced the boy to give up the cheap little room he occupied and to come to the hotel, he talked to him of Australia in general, of a great, new country down under the equator. He spoke of wattle trees and of shrubbery with curious, leathery foliage which enabled it to live by holding moisture; of "Southern bursters", which turned warm days to winter; and of kangaroos and wombats.

Also he talked to his son of Tom Carberry, the mate who had shared the hardships of prospecting with him; of how they had gone hungry and thirsty until in the dry bed of a creek, they had turned up gold nuggets. That story possessed verisimilitude, since it was a tale Dick Morton had told him of a friend. And his son listened with interest and wonder.

After a lapse of weeks, Venable showed to his son a letter from Tom Carberry, since he had written to Carberry, in Sydney, New South Wales, and Carberry had justified his faith by replying immediately—not only by replying immediately but by omitting reference to the

days in Sing Sing and by using the name Venable instead of Ferguson.

There was a separate page of that letter, however, which Venable did not show to his son. It contained an apology for not remitting a sum of money which totaled twenty dollars. Carberry still regarded Australia as God's country and he was thankful that he had been helped to reach it once more, but times were hard. The girl was waiting; she would wait until he could furnish a home for her because she was true blue. In time his luck would change.

That letter seemed to supply that which had been missing in Venable's previous sales efforts. It broke down the boy's resistance to such an extent that he revealed why the return of his father to Detroit had not awakened joyous emotions.

Having no one to whom she could turn, Katherine Venable, when the money left behind by her husband had been expended, had been forced to make a living not only for herself but for her son as well. She had resumed her old position as a stenographer in a stove factory. To put her son through high school, she had sold real estate on Sundays and in spare time during the week.

"She died the fall after I graduated," said the boy, sadness in his face though his voice was steady. "She was tired, I guess."

For a little instant, a memory took possession of Venable's mind; a long memory as it went back to the days of a moldy South Halstead Street tenement and to a woman who had borne ten children, who seemed always tired and one morning had failed to awaken.

"Do you know what a sundowner is?" he asked suddenly.

"No," replied the boy, interest in his eyes.

"Out in the bush, whenever a stranger comes up, he is given food and a bed. No matter how dirty and broken he is, he's always cared for. To turn him away might mean more than just a night in the open."

"What would happen if you did?"

"The dingoes—wild dogs—would tear him to pieces."

VENABLE continued with tales Dick Morton had told him behind the gray walls of Sing Sing, always careful to use Dick Morton's accent and idioms.

After he received Carberry's letter, Venable visited Biddle again. The letter gave him additional confidence; he felt that indeed he was Gordon Worthington Venable.

"I'm well fixed, but I'm just at an age where a man who's been active all his life and quits suddenly, is apt to die suddenly," he told Biddle.

Biddle, more than a little frosty around the temples, nodded.

"I'm going into the bond business. I won't compete with you because I just want to do business enough to keep my time occupied. Do you know of a location?"

Biddle gave him an address and told him to use his name as a reference.

As soon as he had signed the lease for the office, Venable summoned the building sign painter and had his name lettered on the door. Beneath it were the words, Stocks and Bonds, and between those words and his name, at his order, was left plenty of space for another name.

Venable then took his son out of the hardware store and, to his great satisfaction, the boy from the start showed a remarkable aptitude for the bond business. There was not much business at first, not nearly enough to occupy Venable's time, but he wanted his son with him; to have his son associated with him was an essential part of his plan.

The bonds Venable handled were of a character that any savings bank could use as investments. Always they were of thoroughly approved soundness. The yield did not seem to bother him in the slightest so long as the bonds were of unquestioned respectability. If there was any doubt about an issue, he scorned it though in so doing he sacrificed profits.

As if influenced by association with staid and conservative securities, Venable was staid and conservative in his habits. His clothes were cut by a conservative tailor; he still wore silk next to his skin, but silk underwear did not show. Now and then he felt the need of a drink, but he suppressed it. He was playing for too big a stake to risk any slips.

The bond business grew. It might not have grown so fast had Venable been more avid for profits and had not Biddle sent over an occasional customer. Those customers sent by Biddle were only buyers of small lots, but Venable did not care. They increased the volume of his business and volume was what he was after.

When his son reached his twenty-first birthday, Venable did two things. First he gave him the English watch he had bought on Fifth Avenue.

"I want you to have it," he said. "I want you to have it not only because it's worth a lot of money but because it has a sentimental value also. The case is made from the first gold Tom and I took out of the mine. I can remember the day of the strike as plainly as if it were yesterday. I was happy; I thought I would be able to get back to the States at last and see my— I've never told you, son, but I named that mine myself; I named it Katherine."

The boy stroked the watch almost reverently and, seeing the expression in his eyes, Venable smiled another of his inward smiles. Yet he was not through selling himself to his kid, so he did the second thing.

Again he summoned the sign painter and when the workman had left, beneath the name Gordon Worthington Venable, appeared the name, Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr.

"We're partners now," he said to his son.

And because the boy could not answer, Venable knew that at last the sale had been completed.

He was certain of it when from then on his son gave him his confidence. All he had to reveal were little things, the inconsequential affairs of youth but lately out of its teens; nevertheless, Venable held them of importance.

He held them of still more importance when, two years later, his son told him of that for which he had been waiting—the advent of a girl into the life of Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr.

Young Venable flushed when he made that declaration and that flush told the experienced Venable that this girl was the first in the life of young Venable, just as Katherine Bradley had been the first girl in his own life. Even had it not been for the flush, Venable would have known that that girl was the first in the life of his son. Had she not been the first, he would not have been so fluent in his description of her deep blue eyes, her ripping brown hair, the purity and fairness of her skin.

Just to keep the conversation going that he might further study his son, Venable inquired as to the name of the girl.

"Beth Perryman," replied the boy in a whisper. "Her father's name is Ralph Perryman—Lieutenant Ralph Perryman of the detective bureau."

Venable's thoughts had been wandering, but he recalled them with a jerk.

"I didn't get that last," he said quickly.

"Lieutenant Ralph Perryman of the detective bureau. He works at the Michigan Central station. He's got a regular camera eye; knows every crook in the country. He can recognize a crook even if he's only seen his picture."

Thankful at that moment was Venable for his stir training; the stir training that enabled him to mask his emotions. Before his eyes was the picture of an alert man standing at the rope in the Michigan Central station, watching Gordon Worthington Venable walking up the long ramp.

"One of these days you'll be in a position to marry, son," he said slowly.

"We're in no hurry, father. We're both young."

"You're both young. I'm getting old; in a couple of years, one of those two names on the door will come off."

He stopped and surveyed the face of the youth keenly. The boy was sitting well

forward on his chair and at the moment, Venable thought, never before had he resembled him more strongly.

"In the next two years, I'm going after a record," continued Venable. "I'm going to build up our house until it's one of the biggest in town. We'll have a big office; a big office with our own vault. Then I'll step down and give Beth and you a wedding present that will be worthwhile."

The boy shifted uneasily.

"You can go for the day," said Venable. "I know you want to tell her."

Alone in the office, Venable thought deeply. His thoughts were of the new life he had mapped out for himself; the resolution he had taken to go straight when he had realized that further crookedness meant prison for life.

He was succeeding in keeping his resolution; succeeding admirably in keeping it. Some day he would gather his reward; he would be a millionaire and would be able again to frequent the world he loved.

There was just one drawback. Of all the girls in Detroit, his son had to choose the daughter of a detective with an eye like a camera. There were thousands of pretty girls in Detroit, thousands of girls with high color, pleasing bodies and flashing eyes. But from among those thousands, his son had to choose the daughter of the man who stood at the Michigan Central station to mark the advent of law breakers.

VI

THE Gordon Worthington Venable and Gordon Worthington Venable, Jr. bond firm moved into larger quarters. The building was old but it was respectable; it was in eminent keeping with the heavy business of the Venables, since though the volume had grown so greatly that the old office was no longer large enough, it was still conservative with consequently small profits.

In the new offices, Venable had caused to be built a great steel vault equipped with a time lock. To his son he entrusted the task of setting that time lock, cautioning him not to make a mistake.

"If you'd set it for midnight by accident," he said, "you'd give some crook a fine chance to get away with a hundred thousand or so in cash and securities. Crooks seem to work around midnight. I wouldn't if I were a crook—I'd work at around about two o'clock. That's when the human senses are least alert. I read that in a medical book one night out in the bush."

While he was talking, he was keeping a sharp eye on the face of his son.

To install that vault, Venable had to use some of the money he had taken from Wall Street, since the income from the business had not been great enough for such an outlay. He made no attempt to conceal from his son the fact that he had put more money into the business; he could not, had he wished, since his son was entirely cognizant of the profits of the firm.

"I've got plenty left to care for me the rest of my life after I turn this business over to you," Venable said with a smile.

Thereafter, however, with the same adroitness he had used in selling himself to his son, he began to impress on the youth the value of money, the importance of money, what money could bring to a man. He did not mean just an ordinary living; anybody could earn an ordinary living. It took real genius to pile up a million dollars; a million dollars meant something.

"I know what poverty and hard times are," he continued with a sigh.

"So do I," shot back young Venable.

"Of course I wouldn't think of it now, but I don't mind admitting to you, boy, that there were times when, if I found a couple of million lying around handy, I'd have taken it in a minute."

The boy did not answer; he was checking the serial numbers of a municipal issue that had come in that morning.

Time after time Venable laid more emphasis on what money meant in life. He did it with great skill and subtlety, as he had rehearsed those speeches in his cell in

Sing Sing. And whenever he did so, he watched his son.

But while he stressed the importance of money, he encouraged his son to spend money. He sent him to a high priced tailor and opened an account for him at the most expensive haberdashery in town. Also he encouraged him to entertain the daughter of Lieutenant Ralph Perryman. Frequently he suggested little dinners; whenever there was a good attraction at the local theaters, he saw that his son and Beth Perryman had the best seats. They did not ride in street cars; the boy and girl used taxicabs.

"You ought to have a car," suggested Venable.

The boy's eyes did not meet his.

"You can buy it on time," continued Venable. "And don't get a cheap car; cheap automobiles are for cheap people. Get the best."

"I've been looking at one; it costs four thousand dollars."

"Supper money; just supper money. Look at the business we're doing."

Still the young man hesitated.

"When you're going around with a girl as pretty as Beth Perryman, you ought to have the best car in town," urged Venable.

His son placed the order by telephone.

That afternoon, Venable met the girl to whom his son was engaged. She was a pretty girl; a remarkably pretty girl, about her something that suggested cleanness both of mind and body. Venable liked her and, liking her, sold himself to her.

Not so long thereafter, Lieutenant Ralph Perryman called. Venable had been expecting that call; had prepared for it. He recognized the identity of his visitor as he was being admitted and was glad that he did so because in that brief space of time he had an opportunity to so change his position that the light did not shine full on his face.

Perryman remained only a few minutes; he was about to go on duty and had merely stopped to get acquainted. In that few minutes' chat, Venable felt something very nearly approaching liking. If he had been still more sure of himself he might have liked the detective, though in the past, officers had brought him only trouble. But he had to be on his guard constantly.

When the detective left, Venable breathed easier. Also he smiled that inward smile of satisfaction. He had passed through something more or less of an ordeal, but had emerged triumphant. That path to the million had been shortened greatly.

The firm's business continued to increase. Nightly, many thousands of dollars worth of securities rested in the big vault. Venable talked of the wealth in the care of his firm often, while stressing the importance of money in life.

"My money came too late," he complained. "To get the real worth of money a man should have his fortune just when he's starting out in life, not when he's ready to quit. The blood cools after forty. A young man with a million dollars in his possession would have the world at his feet—would have the world at his feet no matter how he got that million!"

"No matter how he got it?" asked the young Venable, looking up from the heap of personal correspondence on his desk.

"No matter how he got it," replied Venable. "But nothing less than a million would pay. On second thought, I'd say two million, because there's an element of risk that must be considered."

He turned to his own letters.

"It wouldn't be possible for a man to steal two million dollars and get away with it," commented young Venable. "He'd be caught."

Venable slit an envelope, took out a check, pushed it to one side and turned to his son.

"I've bumped up against the world a lot," he remarked casually. "You're all wrong; a man could steal two million dollars and get away with it. It would be easy."

Young Venable once more gazed at his correspondence. Right well Venable knew the contents of those envelopes. It was the first of the month; the first of each

month young Venable got more and more bills.

"How would it be easy to steal two million dollars?" asked his son, as if he could not keep his mind away from the subject.

"You'd better be getting over to the bank with these deposits," replied Venable. "But here's the idea—if you want to write a detective story, or something like that. Suppose there were two million dollars in cash and negotiable securities in that vault. Suppose that you'd set the time lock for 2:00 A. M. You could come in, get the boodle and go out again without being seen—there's no watchman in this old rattletrap.

"Windsor is two thousand two hundred and sixty feet from the foot of Woodward Avenue. Windsor is in Canada. You could make your way overland to British Columbia and there get a ship for Australia. Once in Australia, all the Yankee bulls and dicks couldn't lay a finger on you. Australia is God's country; a man's a man down there and nobody asks any questions."

Young Venable took the cash and checks from the bookkeeper and went to the bank.

Venable clasped his hands over his stomach. A shaft of sunlight stole through the window and he moved so that it shone full on his face. At the moment, he was again in the prison library rehearsing the scheme he had just unfolded to his son.

"He'll wait," he said to himself. "I'll see that he waits. And nobody can lay a finger on me."

VII

VENABLE turned the business over to his son on his twenty-fifth birthday.

"I suppose you and Beth will be married now," he remarked.

"Not yet," replied young Venable. "I—"

"You want to square up first?"

"Yes, that's it. I've run behind. We're both young; we can wait another year."

"I'd like to help you out, son. But my money is tied up just now."

"Thanks, father. I'll get along."

"With me out of the firm, it needn't be run along such conservative lines. You'll get ahead faster, if you branch out a little. Those South Americas look mighty attractive and they ought to yield a good profit."

Venable, as if celebrating his freedom from business cares, went to a club nearby and had three glasses of beer. The beer was not mere diversion. The strain of watching his plan develop had caused him to lose some weight; beer would help him gain it back.

When he had told his son he had money enough to live on the rest of his life, he had not spoken the exact truth. In all the world, he had less than five thousand dollars, and he expected to live for the next twenty years at least. But the future gave him no worry. The securities piled up nightly in the Venable vault would grow and grow until they reached two millions. Then, he would meet his son in Australia and divide with him; he would be generous and allow him to keep half of his stealings to compensate him for his trouble and the loss of Beth Perryman.

As for Tom Carberry, he had almost forgotten him. Again Tom Carberry had played a part in his life and vanished.

Venable's visits to the office of his son became less and less frequent. His name had come off the door; to whoever inquired, he gave the information that he had severed his connection with the business; that he had retired permanently. But nevertheless, through a secret agreement with Prentice, the bookkeeper, he had a daily report on the progress of his son. Pleased was he when the volume of business continued to grow greater and greater. And when one night more than a million and a half was in the vault, he grinned and rubbed his hands.

The days dragged by. Despite his endeavors to keep himself in hand, Venable grew uneasy. The sudden slamming of a door gave him a start; a shout had the

same effect. Nights, he double locked the door of his room, though his several years of residence in the same hotel should have convinced him that nothing ever happened there.

Despite all his efforts and the quantities of food he consumed, he lost weight. He drank more beer. The beer, made in some alley garage, nauseated him so that he could not retain it and his stomach trouble made him still thinner. His son, however, did not seem to notice the change, nor did Lieutenant Perryman, whom he met now and then on the street.

It was not anxiety that was consuming him; it was eagerness; just plain eagerness to get his hands on a million dollars and go back to his old world; go back to his old world with no threat of prison hanging over him.

Then, one evening, there came to his hotel room a big man with white hair and a white beard, his face scarred and mottled curiously.

TOM CARBERRY had but one object in returning to the United States, he told Venable as Venable sat on the edge of the bed, cold sweat on his forehead. That object was to repay the debt he owed Venable—he was careful to use that name—a debt which had weighed so heavily on his conscience that he had traveled thousands of miles in order that he might settle it in full.

"You don't owe me anything," chattered Venable.

Carberry insisted that he did; that to Dick Morton had been given twenty dollars and that twenty dollars had enabled Dick Morton to reach Australia and eventually marry the girl who had been waiting.

"You don't owe me anything," insisted Venable, a sense of suffocation heavy on him.

"I do," replied Carberry.

"No so loud, Kan—Tom," pleaded Venable.

"You've squared it," declared Carberry. "What are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid for you," lied Venable. "You've got fifteen hanging around your neck; you broke jail; that's a felony. If they catch you, they'll give you three more. They'll give you three more solid."

"Tom Carberry pays his debts. I don't owe the State of New York anything though; that gun went off accidentally. The five years I served—"

"Cuniffe suspected me of helping you go over the wall; he still suspects me, and you know the principal keeper."

"Why I could walk right up to Cuniffe and grin in his face. Nobody would know me with my map changed like this. My luck's turned at last."

"I'm glad somebody's lucky."

"I went prospecting and found a mine. A bloody blast exploded right in my face. For weeks they didn't know whether I'd snuff out or not. But that accident wasn't bad luck. It turned up the gold and it killed Dick Morton."

Venable could not comment. A most disturbing thought had come to him. Lieutenant Perryman had never called on him in his room. But the detective might do so. He would find Tom Carberry there. He might recognize Carberry as Morton despite those scars. Then not only Dick Morton would go back to prison, but Stephen Ferguson would go back with him.

Dick Morton in Stephen Ferguson's company would be proof to that bulldog, Cuniffe, that Ferguson had aided Morton to escape; aiding a prisoner to escape was a felony; for Stephen Ferguson it would be that fourth felony that would keep him in prison for the rest of his life. It was all Venable could do to keep his teeth from chattering.

He had to get rid of Carberry; he had to get rid of Carberry immediately. But Carberry showed no inclination to leave. He offered Venable money, much money, telling him over and over that he had plenty; that it would please him if Venable would accept it. Over and over Venable refused, his nervousness such that the skin of his entire body prickled.

"Well, Judge—" Venable winced at the sound of the old nickname—"if you won't take money, I've something else to offer you—something I'd rather give you. You're getting old; come on back to Australia with me. You'll never have to work again; you can spend the rest of your days in peace and quiet. Quiet! Why, the nearest neighbor is five miles away! We'll go fishing and hunting, and once in awhile, when Aggie don't object too strong, we'll go to town and see a boxing bout—the real stuff, hammer and tongs. You won't have to eat mutton, either."

Venable very nearly regurgitated; not at the thought of mutton, but because of his nervousness and the picture of the life Carberry had painted. The nearest neighbor five miles away; hunting; boxing bouts; a rough country; no flashing jewels, women, pleasing perfumes or music. Prison could not be much worse. With that thought, Venable shook his head because he could not trust himself to speak.

"We'll talk it over with Aggie," declared Carberry, his tone that of one certain that his wife would change Venable's mind. "She came along too. That is, she brought me to the States and she's downstairs waiting to meet you."

Venable would have held back but Carberry took him by the arm, and Carberry's grip was strong.

AGNES CARBERRY did not fit in with Venable's visualization of the true blue girl who had waited while Dick Morton served time and until Tom Carberry had wrested a fortune from the earth. He had thought of her as a flashing, lithe creature, fairly bubbling with life—a girl much as Katherine Bradley had been when Gordon Worthington Venable had courted her.

Slow moving and stolid was Mrs. Carberry, her eyes the color of slate and her hair a sandy red. Wide she was, her hips, her bosom and her shoulders, but especially her hips and her bosom. To Venable she looked not like romance but like a mother. But her firm mouth and her equally firm chin made her more than a mother; she was maternal, true, but at the same time she was dominant.

The look she gave Venable made him feel as if she were searching his soul. But a smile softened her features and she spoke with a pleasant drawl and Venable, still virtually a prisoner, went down to dinner with the couple. It was not a comfortable meal for Venable. The fear of the possible advent of Perryman haunted him and then, too, not knowing how much of the past Carberry had revealed to his wife, he had to keep a constant bridle on his tongue.

She too asked Venable to go to Australia and live with them. He could not tell whether or not she was relieved when, with what politeness he could command, he refused. But he judged that she was rather more pleased than disappointed.

Mrs. Carberry having accepted his refusal, Venable felt more at ease until, with those piercing eyes full on him, she suggested that he summon his son; she had hoped that she would have a son of her own; the absence of a son was the only lack in her life.

Venable tried to evade her request, but in the end he stepped to the telephone and called his son's office, the action merely a gesture, as he did not believe young Venable would be anywhere near Griswold Street at that time.

But young Venable was there and, what with his surprise and his worry, Venable very nearly made the first slip of his life. In telling his son why he wanted him to come to the hotel for the evening, he almost forgot to simulate great joy at the fact that the man who had helped him find gold in Australia and thus enabled him to return to the States, was in Detroit. Having remedied that omission just in time, he got himself in hand and babbled into the telephone as if he were the happiest man in the city. Young Venable then said that, under the circumstances, he could do nothing save break an engagement with Beth Perryman and meet the Carberrys.

With Tom Carberry, though he shook hands heartily, young Venable seemed to be a bit inclined to be stand-offish. With Mrs. Carberry, his attitude was different. To Venable's surprise, the woman and the boy became friends the instant they met and chatted together like old acquaintances.

"Your mother is dead?" asked Mrs. Carberry, in a lull in the conversation.

"Mother died two years before father returned from Australia," replied the young man.

Venable's heart very nearly stood still but his stir training enabled him to hide the tumult within him. He did not know how much of the contents of his letter of explanation Carberry had told his wife, and should she have shown surprise that Venable had been in Australia, that million would have been in grave jeopardy, since young Venable was no fool.

She said nothing, however, and Carberry picked up the conversation with tales in Australia. Venable then breathed more comfortably. In Carberry's discourse lay no danger, as Venable, when discussing Australia with his son, had been careful to quote and not to improvise.

Before the interminable evening ended, Mrs. Carberry, quite openly, began to mother young Venable, and though young Venable was wearing a sandy mustache on his upper lip, he did not resent that mothering; to Venable, sitting in such a position that he could note every shade of expression on the face of his son, it seemed as if the boy had been hungry for just that kind of affection.

All that night Venable lay awake trying to hatch a scheme that would get the Carberrys started on their way back to Australia without delay. But his mind, usually so fertile when his self-interest was at stake, showed unmistakable signs of absolute sterility. He realized then that he had concentrated so long on that one grand scheme that he could not turn his thoughts into new channels.

Hour after hour he lay, fighting vainly to steer his thoughts from the blind alleys into which they led him. The dawn found him beaten.

THE CARBERRYS did not show any indications of being in a hurry to leave Detroit. For that, Venable, burning with wrath, blamed Mrs. Carberry. Continually, she petted young Venable; babied him, as Venable wrathfully remarked to himself. That mothering worried Venable, since he feared its effect on his son. His whole scheme was jeopardized—hung in the balance.

Nor was that his only fear. As Mrs. Carberry and his son grew closer, he thought he detected less friendliness for himself in the eyes of the wife of the man he had befriended. To Venable, it seemed as if she regarded him as an enemy. But all he could do was to continue to simulate pleasure he by no means felt.

When Venable thought he could endure the strain no longer, Carberry announced that his wife and he were about to depart.

"We're going to New York," he said casually.

"New York!" exclaimed Venable, his mind in a whirl.

"Yes," replied Carberry. "I pay my debts. I'm going to compensate that grocer I shot. It was an accident, but he suffered and lost time away from his business. Aggie says I ought to fix him up and I always mind Aggie."

"God Almighty!" shouted Venable. "You can't do that, Kangaroo! It might mean stir for you; it might mean stir for both of us. Don't let a lot of bunk about paying get you into a jam!"

"I won't get into a jam, Judge. I can take care of myself, and I've got Aggie to help me."

"You'll stop here on your way back?" asked Venable, his palms wet with perspiration.

"No, Judge, I'm through with Detroit. I'm going to the Coast over the old route. I want to see the friends who helped me get home. So I won't see you again unless you change your mind and come down to Australia. Remember, Judge, no matter what happens, you've got a home down there."

"Thanks, Kanga—Tom, thanks,"

grunted Venable, hardly knowing what he was saying. "Maybe I'll take you up some day. But for God's sake be careful in New York."

"Judge, I—"

He did not finish. Mrs. Carberry entered the room. She looked first at her husband and then at Venable. The inspection complete, she too informed Venable that whenever he wished, he had a home with the Carberrys, and Venable knew that this time she meant it. He thanked her and wished her and her husband luck. But he did not offer to go to the Michigan Central station with them; Perryman was on duty at that station.

Hardly were they out of the hotel before Venable had his grip packed. Going to the bank, he drew all of his Wall Street money. For days, with currency pinned to his silk underwear, he roamed about the streets, his eyes and senses alert and with the time of every departing train in his mind. Footsteps coming from behind made him jumpy and he did not enjoy food.

His fingers fumbled when he tried to open a telegram that came three weeks later. But when he did get out the oblong yellow sheet, he wanted to dance with joy. The Carberrys had sailed. With them on the high seas, his worries were at an end.

At once, he took inventory of himself. The strain had told on him. His face had lost much of its former roundness; his expensive clothing no longer fit, but hung in bags. He had to have a new suit at once, since he could not go about his business in such ill-fitting garments. Also he had to fatten up again.

His first big meal showed him that that would be a process that would take time. He could retain only small quantities of food. For that, he blamed the bad beer he had consumed when he had first begun to lose weight.

His physical condition necessitated remaining more or less under cover. Idling in his room, he made a curious discovery. Never before in all his life had he missed a human being with whom he had been associated. With him, it had been touch and go. That had firmed in him the belief that all human contacts were only casual. Then he found that he was actually lonely for his son. That amazed him and he decided that it was only transitory. But in the next forty-eight hours, instead of passing away as he had expected that feeling of loneliness increased to such an extent that, despite his new slimness, he went to the office of his boy.

Young Venable hardly raised his eyes when his father entered. His greeting was perfunctory and subsequent conversation not voluble. No willingness did he show to meet the gaze of his father. But Venable, patient and hopeful, maneuvered until his eyes looked into the eyes of his son.

Under the eyes of the boy were dark circles; his cheeks were sunken and his whole appearance that of one under great strain. Venable's heart bounded; he thought he could interpret all those signs and that they meant that the million was very near.

In a sentence spoken heavily and with evident effort, the son showed Venable his error.

"It may interest you to know that Beth Perryman and I are no longer engaged," he said, and immediately turned his head.

"Too bad, old man," returned Venable.

He did not consider it too bad, however; he considered it good. A lover's quarrel amounted to nothing. But when two young persons who had been engaged for a long time called the engagement off, then it must be serious. Venable knew full well that his son loved Beth Perryman. But in his heart, he was glad that the situation had resolved itself as it had. A young man filled with the belief that the object of his affections was definitely lost to him was ready for any sort of desperate enterprise.

On his way out, Venable signaled to Prentice and the bookkeeper met him that evening. From him, Venable learned that his son was working harder than he ever had; that each night he returned to the office.

"Expecting any big business soon?" asked Venable carelessly.

"Next Wednesday night we'll have more than two million in our vault," replied Prentice proudly. "A big bunch of odd lots are coming in for delivery and there'll be a pile of customer's cash, too."

Early Tuesday afternoon Venable wandered into his son's office, his apparel a perfectly fitting suit that had been delivered that morning.

"I'm going to Chicago on business," he said, as he had said to the mother of the youth, twenty-five years before. "I'm leaving tonight and won't be back for about a week."

Young Venable, with the circles under his eyes darker than ever and his face paler and more sunken, mumbled goodby and turned to the work on his desk.

That evening, Venable, after he had obtained his ticket and his berth, wandered about the station until he encountered Perryman, and though that meeting looked quite accidental, Venable had brought it about intentionally.

"Going somewhere?" asked the detective.

"To Chicago," replied Venable. "I've got some business there that will keep me busy about a week. Always on the job, aren't you, Lieutenant?"

"Not much gets by me," replied the detective.

Venable, his little black grip in his hand, walked leisurely down the long ramp, climbed the stairs to the platform and boarded the train.

VIII

IN CHICAGO Venable registered and asked to be assigned to a room with a bath. Five minutes after he had gone up in the elevator, he was back at the desk. The room did not suit him; it was too noisy.

"Sorry, Mr. Venable," said the clerk. "It's the best we can do for you—you didn't have any reservation."

"I'll have to stand it," grumbled Venable. "If anything better turns up, you'll change me, of course?"

"Certainly, Mr. Venable. Certainly."

Assured that his name and face had been impressed on the clerk, Venable went to the dining room. Instead of paying the check, he signed it and had the meal charged to his room. Should there ever be an inquiry as to his whereabouts on that particular Wednesday, both verbal and written evidence would be at hand. It was an alibi that would stand; an alibi that had been worked out behind the gray walls of Sing Sing.

Late in the afternoon, Venable came down from his room and took a chair in the lobby. It was a comfortable chair, but he occupied it only a minute or two and then paced up and down. Going to the desk, he inquired for mail and was handed a letter—one he had written himself the day before. With his alibi still more secure, he seated himself only to rise after a short interval and resume his pacing.

The clock over the desk interested him; every minute or so he glanced at it. A few minutes after five, he stepped into the street and watched the hurrying, home going crowds.

They held his interest but briefly. Hurrying back into the hotel, he took the elevator to his room, grabbed his grip and, running into the hall, held his finger on the button until a car stopped.

In the lobby, he deliberately elbowed his way to the head of the line at the cashier's desk, paid his bill and dashed through the door. Outside, he informed the starter that he wanted a taxicab immediately. The starter's fingers closed over a bill and he shrilled his whistle.

Venable spoke rapidly to the chauffeur and pressed a ten-dollar bill into his hand.

"You'll catch that train O. K, Chief," promised the driver.

Venable did, but without a second to spare.

He had been on his way two hours when the porter held a short conversation with the porter of the car following.

"How fast we going, boy?" asked Venable's porter.

"'Bout sixty-five or seventy, 'long here," was the reply.

"Gentleman in my cah's tryin' to make us go faster!" averred Venable's porter.

He spoke a fact; Venable was trying to speed that flying train.

As the train thundered through the outskirts of Detroit, Venable was on the platform and the porter had to restrain him to keep him from leaping off before a stop was made.

Up the long ramp sped Venable, looking neither to the right nor the left. In the station, he glanced at the wall clock and his breath sucked over dry lips. He had but twenty minutes.

With a burst of speed, he succeeded in catching the only taxicab on the stand.

Extremely light traffic favored him; he reached his destination with a few minutes to spare. Up the stairway he bounded on tip toes. In front of the dark offices of his son, he stopped to catch his breath before he used the key he had not given up when he had turned over the business.

Cautiously, he opened the door and stepped inside.

A switch snapped and the offices were flooded with light.

Before him, a pistol in his hand, stood his son.

With the weapon pointed at him, Venable looked his son in the eye.

"You can't go through with it!" he croaked.

"I can kill you," replied the youth, his voice cold and cutting as steel.

"You can kill me—I won't be any loss. I've been a grifter and a damned crook all my life."

"I know you've been a crook. I know you've been in prison three times. Because you're a crook, I've given up the girl I love. The son of a crook can't marry the daughter of an officer of the law."

"Did her father tell you my record?"

"Her father didn't tell me; Mrs. Carberry told me. She didn't want to tell me because you'd done something for her husband—she didn't say what you had done. But she looked on me as a son. It was her duty, she said—her duty to tell me what you were so I could save you from going to prison for life!"

"Great God! Save me! I—I—"

"After she put me on my guard, I thought over what you had told me about setting the time lock for two o'clock in the morning; about stealing two million dollars and going to Australia. Every night I came back here and watched the vault. Tonight I caught my own father coming back here to blow open that vault. You're carrying the tools in that little black grip that you've dropped on the floor. You never gave up your tools. You had that grip with you when you first came back to Detroit!"

"I'm not a boxman, son," said Venable in a voice no one had ever heard him use before. "That grip's harmless. You don't need a gun; I didn't come back from Chicago to rob your vault; I came back to keep you from robbing it!"

The expression on young Venable's face was that of utter disbelief.

Then Venable told him; told him of the grand scheme he had worked out in Sing Sing, the wonderful plan that might make a convict of the son but would give the father a million dollars without the threat of prison. Not a single sordid detail did he omit.

"But I couldn't let you go through with it," he declared. "After all, you're my kid."

"Keep your hands at your sides. I've got you covered, Steve Ferguson," said a quiet voice.

Both Venable and his son started, since neither had heard the door open.

"Put up that gun, Perryman," ordered Venable. "You've made a mistake."

"I don't make mistakes; you're Steve Ferguson. I thought there was something familiar about you when I first saw you more than five years ago. When you began to get thinner, I felt more sure—so sure I wired New York to see if you were wanted. Tonight, when you came up the station ramp, I made you and followed you here to see what you were up to. I was delayed a little—you copped the first taxi."

"Perryman, you are mistaken. Steve Ferguson's dead; he died the third day

after he left Sing Sing; he died on a train between Boston and Windsor. Even if he wasn't dead, it wouldn't make any difference because Steve Ferguson has paid the State of New York everything he owes—everything the State of New York can prove he owes. New York told you that."

Perryman nodded; but he did not lower his revolver.

"Gordon Worthington Venable deserted his wife and kid," continued Venable earnestly. "But Venable came back here and made good—started a respectable business which he turned over to his son. He didn't do it with Steve Ferguson's money, either. Steve Ferguson came out of Sing Sing broke except for the small change the State gave him. Venable got the nut for this business out of Wall Street; he started with the only honest money he ever made in his life. What's left is in that little black grip on the floor there—that's my heel."

"But why did you come back tonight after planting an alibi with me?"

Young Venable would have spoken, but Venable stopped him.

"Gordon Worthington Venable died at 5:15 Wednesday afternoon in Chicago," he said. "It was George Washington Vent, a kid eight or nine years old, too young to start to go crooked, who came back here. George Washington Vent never had a chance in life. He's asking for a break now because he too is about to pass out of the picture. He's going to Australia and he's never coming back to the States."

For a long minute the detective kept his eyes on Venable's face.

Venable picked up his grip, opened it and disclosed a few packages of currency.

The detective turned to young Venable.

"It's two o'clock in the morning," he said. "But Beth's awake; she hasn't slept lately. Call her up and tell her—but you know what to tell her."

With a look of joy on his face, young Venable lifted the receiver from the hook.

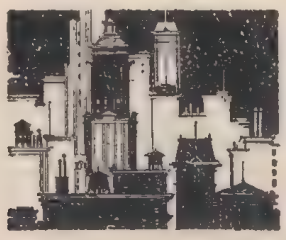
Venable, with the same dignity that had caused men to call him Judge, his little black grip in his hand, walked slowly toward the door.

He had very nearly reached it when on his shoulder rested the hand of the law, just as it had rested three times before.

"Headquarters?" he asked, before his eyes the vision of gray walls.

"I just wanted to tell you that I wouldn't be surprised if the youngsters would go down to Australia on their wedding trip," said the detective.

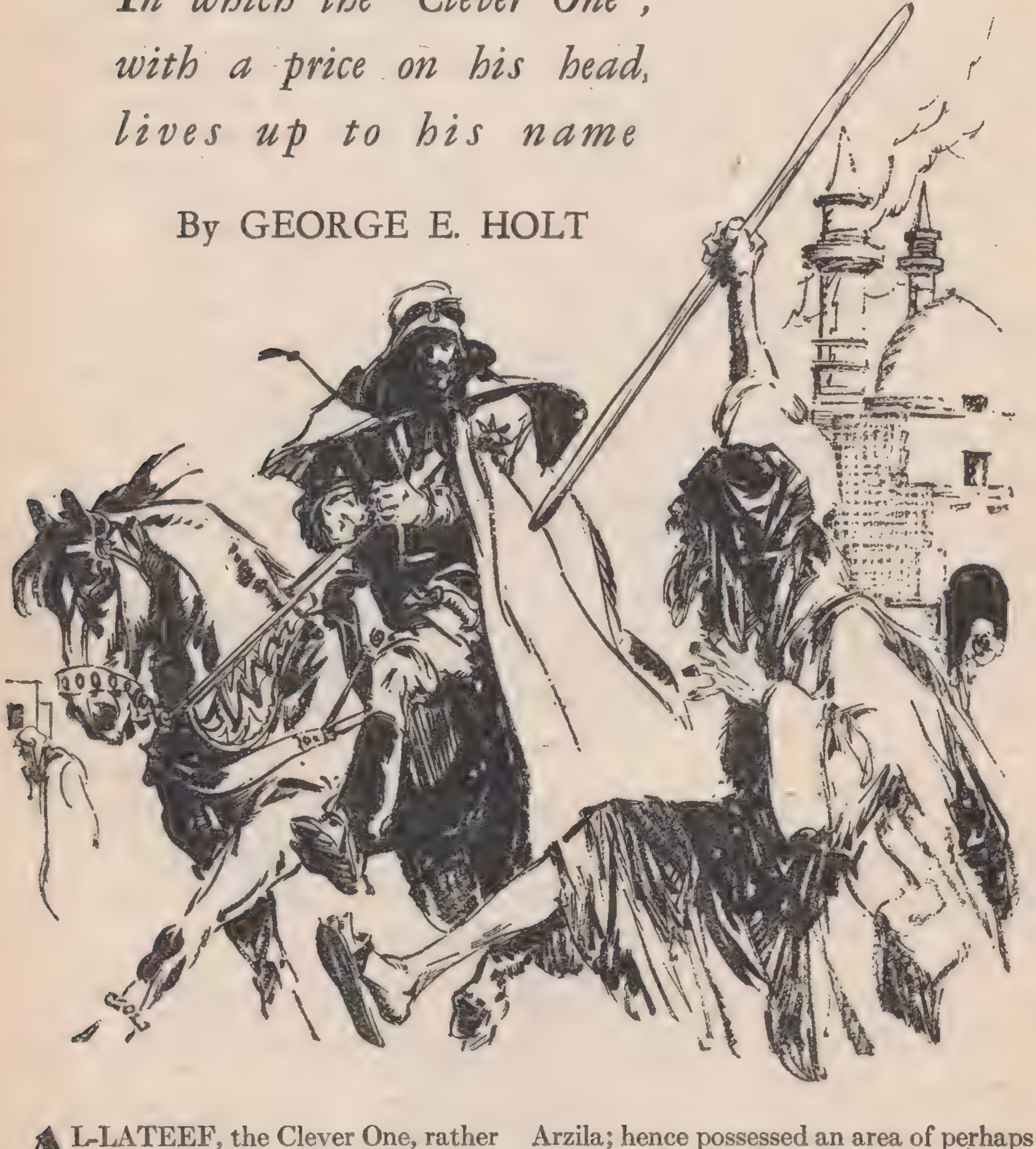
And Venable found himself shaking hands with the law.



Al-Lateef Is *Al-Lateef*

In which the "Clever One", with a price on his head, lives up to his name

By GEORGE E. HOLT



AL-LATEEF, the Clever One, rather sourly reflected that his name at the present moment did not quite fit.

Al-Lateef was a prisoner.

True, his prison was a big one. It was bounded on the north, south, east and west by the high thick walls of the city of Arzila; hence possessed an area of perhaps a square mile. Nevertheless it was truly a prison, for the four gates had been closed by order of the basha, and none might enter or depart until the ban had been lifted by the august one whose command had imposed it.

Nor was this all. The gates had been

closed in order that the town might be combed for one whose head the basha desired greatly to view upon an iron hook over one of the four gates. Which particular gate did not matter.

That head was as yet in its proper place upon the neck of Al-Lateef. But from the roof of the house wherein he had sought sanctuary, Al-Lateef had just been listening attentively to the far flung racket raised by the basha's searching parties. The clatter of many horses upon the cobbled streets. Shouts. Surprised cries. Breaking in of doors. Shrill protests. Runnings about. Quick noises and quick silences following.

Descending from the house top, Al-Lateef squatted cross-legged upon a Rabat rug, lighted an American cigaret, drew his brown *djellab* about him and considered the state of that portion of Morocco which immediately concerned himself.

Manifestly his name did not quite suit the moment. It was, no doubt, very satisfactory to one's ego to have the epithet "the Clever One" applied to himself; but it might also be an unpleasant boomerang to one's spirit. Something definitely sarcastic, should the public read, upon a placard beneath a gruesome thing on a hook over the city gate, "Al-Lateef, the Clever One."

Somehow he had erred. Somewhere his foot had slipped from the stirrup. Some one had learned that Al-Lateef actually was in Arzila. Bad.

The Clever One was faced not only by one problem, but by two. Not only did he have to avoid capture by the searching parties, but he had to get out of the city. If such a distinction were possible, this second problem was of more importance than the first one. Because Al-Lateef thought it probable that he would be able to escape the search, in one way or another, if he could remain in the city. But he could not remain. He must get himself outside those high walls and on the road to El-Arache before sunset, searching parties or no searching parties. Because word had just reached him that his friend, John Stone, the American, had just been flung into the filthy prison at El-Arache and must be rescued at once in order to avoid being shot the next morning.

John Stone's nationality, Al-Lateef knew, would not protect him; for the American had been engaged in that act which is never approved by governments —helping the underdog. And John Stone was more than active in stirring up opposition among the natives to the foreign control of Morocco which now seriously threatened. Yes, beyond a doubt, Al-Lateef must escape from Arzila. Or endeavor to do so. And at once.

He crushed out the fire of the cigaret and rose. His left arm hung stiffly and a white bandage showed beneath the cuff of the *djellab* sleeve. The knife of Bin-Salah, the basha's *khalifa*, had gone through that arm the preceding night, when he and Al-Lateef had fought to the death—the *khalifa's* death—in the darkness by the gate. That had been necessary. That was what had brought Al-Lateef into this stinking city which was now disrupted by posses in search of him. The *khalifa* was now tossing about in the flames—of that Al-Lateef was quite certain; for it is written in the Book that he who robs the orphan and the poor and the defenseless shall so do. To say nothing of posing as a friend and bartering one's head for a pot of silver. Al-Lateef's head, that is to say.

Swiftly Al-Lateef disrobed himself of the clothing he wore. Any moment might bring the loud summons of the searchers upon the door of this house of his friend, El-Kadour. To be sure, there was a way out over the roof, but the use of that exit did not fit into Al-Lateef's plans.

From a wooden chest he took other clothing—a patched and tattered *djellab*, a shirt which had once in some long gone day been white and whole; baggy breeches of similar condition; a green turban; a handful of dirty rags. Quickly he arrayed himself in the disreputable clothing. He twisted the green turban about his head, letting it fall rather loosely, so that it covered as much of his head as possible. The

green turban of saintship, making a *marabout*, a holy man, of him. He considered the metamorphosis in a small mirror, in a gaudily painted pine frame, hanging on the wall.

Then he went to a charcoal pot which stood in a corner of the room, scooped up a handful of cold ashes, returned to the mirror and swiftly changed his glossy black beard to the venerable gray of age. His black eyebrows, likewise. Beneath his eyes he rubbed a little soot from the charcoal pot. He wet his finger on his tongue and rubbed it upon the crimson paint of the mirror frame, which, being soluble, came off. With this he created repulsive blotches upon his cheeks and chin.

From the chest he took two large dried peas, thrust them up one nostril, thus distorting his nose. Around his head he tied one of the filthy rags, bandage-wise, so that it covered one eye. Then he wrapped the green turban, symbol of holiness, of saintship, letting it fall rather loosely so that it covered his forehead.

Al-Lateef considered himself in the mirror, nodded. If he did not look like a wretched, diseased, poverty stricken fanatic of a holy man, he looked like nothing else in the world.

He chucked his former raiment into the chest. From the street outside the house came the clatter of horses' hoofs on the cobbles, shouts.

HASTILY Al-Lateef seized a long staff which stood in a corner and descended the dark stairway to the house door. He opened it just as the iron knocker was pounded by an impatient hand.

Two soldiers of the basha, carrying rifles, stood there.

"Peace be upon you," quavered Al-Lateef. "May no harm come to you." He raised his hand in benediction, stepped past them.

"But—wait, Sidi," said one. "Who is within this house?"

"Only the servant who gained holiness by giving me food," replied Al-Lateef. "A worthy creature. If you are hungry—"

"Come, let us look, and waste no more time with this *marabout*," said the other soldier.

They entered; Al-Lateef, staff tapping the cobbles, took his way toward the gate which opened on the road to El-Arache.

In Morocco there is not only a surplus of "holy" men of greatly varying degrees of holiness, but there are hundreds of living "saints." There, death is not a necessary prerequisite to canonization. Nor, it may be also said, is any great demonstration of holiness or popular acclaim necessary. Almost without exception these saints—like the holy men—are self-proclaimed. Nobody ever thinks of questioning the proclamation.

The saintship of one may manifest itself by no acts more important than devoting one's life to removing loose cobblestones from the roads so that horses and mules shall not injure themselves. Or, perhaps, to bless every new born child. Or to assure male children to expectant mothers. Or to proclaim the greatness of some other saint—Sidi Mekfee, who brings the rains; Mulai Idrees, the patron of the candy makers; Mulai This or Sidi That. And it must also be understood that probably ninety-nine per cent. of these saints and holy men are not *compos mentis*; they are harmless lunatics, of many degrees of lunacy. But in the religion and philosophy of the Moors, God dwells in the head which has been vacated by the mind, as in a sacred temple.

Hence there is respect, reverence, charity and kindness on the most part for those who stalk Moses-like through the marketplaces and give their messages to their brothers and sisters. And the curse of any one of them is a thing to be avoided, with as much care as the Sultan himself avoids certain areas of bare earth where evil *djinns* make their homes.

Not always, however; for even in uncivilized Morocco there is a low class of people who know laws of neither God nor man, and who have respect for nothing save reward or punishment plainly to be

perceived in the immediate future. Of these the half negro soldiers of the basha, who were now venomously searching for Al-Lateef, were excellent example. And the officers of these forces were thugs imported from Algeria, half civilized by contact with the French, and thus combining all the evils of savagery and civilization. The Prophet himself, had he deigned to return for an earthly visit from paradise, would have been unsafe among them—if any one had offered a reward for his head.

And so, when Al-Lateef stepped from the doorway of his house of refuge, he went forth to walk among those who would accept him unquestioningly for what he appeared and proclaimed himself to be, and also among those who would have hesitatingly stripped his sacred green turban from his head and carried that head to the basha with shouts of joy and wild anticipations of reward. Al-Lateef's garb of sanctity would not suffice unaided; from the temple within his head must come protection when the need should arise.

That protection very quickly was needed.

Scarcely had Al-Lateef gone a hundred yards toward the city gate—which he could perceive quite clearly at the end of the narrow street which he traversed—before two swarthy Algerians, carrying rifles, hove into view, driving before them half a dozen frightened, chattering citizens, men, women and even a small boy. They were prodding the laggards on with their rifle muzzles and at the same moment shouting warnings of immediate death to any one who should attempt to get away from their threats.

The Algerians were swaggering, ignorant bullies, like all mercenaries. Unfortunately there was no side street down which Al-Lateef could turn to avoid meeting the soldiers. Nor did he dare turn and retrace his steps to such a street which he had passed a little way back. Such an obvious attempt to avoid the patrol would instantly call suspicion down upon him—and probably a bullet in the spine. Wherefore, as so many men have done, he approached the danger bravely because there was no way to avoid it.

His fears were speedily realized.

"May no harm come to you," he flung at them with hand raised in greeting. "The peace of Allah be upon you."

He made to pass on, as though their business was no concern of his. But a hard rifle muzzle was poked unpleasantly into his stomach, whereupon he recoiled and looked into the evil grinning face of one of the Algerians.

"The curse of Satan upon you," snarled the soldier. "Who said you could pass?"

"Pass?" queried Al-Lateef innocently. "Pass—what?"

"Pass me," snapped the guard. "Do you think a lousy flea house of a beggarly priest is any better than the rest of this scum here? Who are you and where are you going?"

"I am," replied Al-Lateef, with dignity, "Al-Lateef the *marabout*, going about my business of saving the souls of evil doers by reminding them of the ever-presence of Allah. He walks with me, and he walks with you, and with all those who you drive before you with your guns. So that when you drive them, you drive also Allah himself."

He raised his hands and his voice toward heaven.

"There is no god but Allah," he cried loudly, "and I, Al-Lateef, the *marabout*, declare his ever-presence." He dropped his voice, turned again to the guard, his hand uplifted in benediction. "Go with Allah," he said. "Keep his commands and may no harm fall upon you. I go to bring Allah to an evil doer who lies ill by the market gate. *Selaama.*"

"Crazy, like all of these mangy priests," growled the soldier to his companion. "He says his name is Al-Lateef. Hmph! Despite the name, he assuredly is not him we seek. Our Al-Lateef is no stinking *marabout*, that is certain.

The other soldier guffawed.

"Think you that if he were Al-Lateef, he would say so? Come, we have wasted too much time upon a fleas' nest. Get on, swine! Get on!"

AL-LATEEF overheard, and a little grin flicked at the corners of his mouth as he shuffled on toward the city gate, tapping his staff upon the cobbles, and now and then shouting skyward his faith in the one God, in which he was quite sincere.

As he neared the gate he saw that there was quite a throng about it. This was to be expected, of course, for here would be the most severe examination of those who desired to pass from the city. For a moment Al-Lateef's courage deserted him. He might turn back, lose himself again in the city, encounter only other ignorant soldiers—and be, for awhile at least, safe.

To enter the throng at that gate and to demand passage would cause intense scrutiny—and in a quarter of an hour his head might be hanging over that same gate. But only for a moment did he hesitate—for then memory of his American friend awaiting his help in the prison of El-Arache came to replace the thought of his own danger. He must pass the gate; that, he resolved, was all that he would think about. He strode on.

It was a hundredfold worse than he had expected; for, as he drew near, a man approached on horseback from a side street and drew rein to gaze down upon the throng. A fat man wrapped in haughty white garments; a fat man with a round evil face largely covered by a black beard. The basha of Arzila himself. The man who had closed the city gates; whose orders were causing the town to be combed for Al-Lateef. The man who himself would place Al-Lateef's head over the gate beneath which he now stood, could Al-Lateef be brought low. The man who now was gazing—or seemed to be gazing—directly into Al-Lateef's own eyes.

Hesitation now would be suicide. Al-Lateef commended his soul to Allah and stepped forward. And then there came to him, either from his imagination or more directly from the spirit of the god he acknowledged, an idea—one small hope of life.

He raised his staff and swung it wildly in the air. He picked up with his left hand the skirt of his tattered *djellab*, exposing bare legs high. He began turning about in swift circles, and his voice he raised in shouts of fanatic religion. His eyes were fixed and glaring. He slobbered. His voice rose to a shriek and dropped to a chant.

And he announced, most loudly of all, the name of Al-Lateef.

"I am Al-Lateef," he cried. "I am the one whom Allah has made clever for his glory and the punishment of the evil doer. May his anger rest heavy upon the necks of all those who commit evil. May his benediction lighten the heart of all those who live righteously and give alms. There is no God but Allah, and I, Al-Lateef, proclaim his greatness."

He made his way grotesquely closer to the group, closer to the basha, who was now eyeing him with a look of repulsion.

"You are assembled," he shouted again, "by the power of Allah to hear the message of Al-Lateef, who is his servant. Listen then, give ear, and you shall hear what is written concerning the way of the evil doer."

He began to quote from the Book, drawing nearer and nearer to the haughty figure upon the restless horse. At last he stood but a few feet away, and the horse shied at the swinging staff.

"Be careful, fool!" growled the basha, and reined back.

Al-Lateef glared at him, his mouth drooling saliva over his filthy chin.

"Fool! Fool, Sidi? Those who serve God are fools? Listen then to what is said of those in high places, of those who wear the white *k'sas* of ceremony, and who ignore the ever-presence of Allah the Almighty. I, Al-Lateef, the servant whom God has made clever by his word, shall tell—"

With a motion of his white fat hand the basha summoned the guards.

"Put him outside the walls," he commanded.

They laid hands upon Al-Lateef and rustled him through the crowd while he protested shrilly.

"I do not wish to go forth from the

city," he declared. "I am thrust out from among you against my will. I remain to preach the gospel of the one God. Those who do this thing shall suffer. I am Al-Lateef, and—"

The voice of the basha boomed again.

"When he is outside, beat him a little—for his name's sake," he commanded, and grinned.

A stupid faced guard near to the basha offered a suggestion.

"But, Excellency, if his name be indeed Al-Lateef—"

The basha scowled upon him, silenced him with the look.

"Fool!" he said. "Would Al-Lateef give his own name? Make way. I proceed."

The guards who thrust Al-Lateef outside were not Algerians, but respecters of holy men of all sorts; wherefore, as the basha's eyes could not penetrate the wall—

"Shout a little," they requested of Al-Lateef, "as though you were being beaten somewhat—and go with Allah on your way."

So Al-Lateef shouted loudly thrice, and thereafter set off down the dusty golden road toward the distant prison of El-Arache where his American friend needed his aid . . .

From Arzila to El-Arache is something over a score of miles, too far to walk with such a motive for haste as impelled Al-Lateef. But it chanced that perhaps a mile along the road there was a small garden, or farm, where dwelt a friend to whom the outlaw had rendered more than one service and from whom he had as yet asked no return. Wherefore he now sought this man. And swiftly thereafter he rode forth upon a horse which, although it would have won neither races by its speed, nor awards for its beauty, nor respect for its pedigree, was still a horse, possessing four legs instead of two, and consequently able to make at least twice as good time as a man afoot.

It is not common for holy men to ride horseback, nor even muleback. If they ride at all, it is usually on the precarious rump of some jogging donkey. But this horse was in keeping with its rider. Any one seeing a holy man upon such a steed would make ribald remarks to the effect that some individual had given the horse as alms, and thus saved a small coin. And with this beast Al-Lateef raced the sun, but he did not reach El-Arache until the stars were out.

Neither the darkness nor the closed city gates disturbed him, however. The darkness would aid him. Even had he arrived earlier, he would have had to await the coming of night to get to work. And as for the gates, it was much easier to scale the decaying city walls than to argue with a guard. Wherefore Al-Lateef rode along the wall to the spot he fancied, picketed his mount there and, putting his slippers into the hood of his *djellab*, was soon up and over the barrier. On earth again, he resumed his slippers and set off for the marketplace, near which was also the prison where his American friend was being held.

The marketplace—or great *sok*—of El-Arache was unique even for Morocco. All about the open area ran a colonnade of Moorish arches. Walls extended behind each arch, so that small rooms were formed. These rooms were occupied by petty merchants, or as granaries, or as hotel rooms, as it were, by travelers whose animals were picketed to long chains stretched across the market. There were no doors provided for these arched booths, but makeshifts of canvas, or of sacking, or, in rarer cases, rugs, served as such. For protection of their goods, merchants who held forth in the El-Arache *sok* slept in their shops.

In two or three of the arches the weak light of candle lanterns gleamed yellowly, where black shadows pored over their day's accounts, or sat smoking hasheesh and planning how to take advantage of the morrow—or an acquaintance. In one corner of the *sok* half a dozen late arrivals at the caravanserai squatted in a circle about a small camp-fire and plunged their hands into a big dish of *kesk'soo*.

The steady snore of some industrious sleeper drummed upon the night. There

was the clink of iron picket chain as animals moved restlessly. The heavy air was spicy with the mixed odors of a marketplace, and from the darkness a native banjo gave forth its plaintive chant.

These things greeted Al-Lateef's senses as he paused for a moment within the shadow of the great gate of the *sok*. But his gaze rested not upon the marketplace, but upon a huge square tower which rose above the arched colonnade upon his right hand. The tower was entirely dark, but slivers of starlight marked iron bars and indicated two windows. The tower itself was forty feet or more in height, above the top of the colonnade; the windows were almost midway between top and bottom. The tower interested Al-Lateef. It was familiar to him. He had even been a guest within it. It was the prison of El-Arache.

THE ENTRANCE, he knew, was from a street running parallel to the arches of the marketplace. What he now looked at was the rear wall.

Suddenly he stopped looking and listened, head cocked. Then he smiled to himself and slippered toward the arch immediately below the prison tower. It was from there that the native banjo was uttering its thin notes, of monotonous range.

As Al-Lateef's shadow stood in the archway, the music—if it could be called such—ceased and Al-Lateef breathed a name.

"Aidomar?"

"Yes, master," a youthful voice replied.

Thereupon Al-Lateef stepped forward to squat upon the matting beside his nephew, and for half an hour to engage him in a whispered conversation. By the time they had finished, the camp-fire in the *sok* was out and the diners were snoring about it. The candle lanterns here and there had been extinguished. The entire place seemed wrapped in sleep.

Then, as things happen in a dream, a black ghost came from the arch beneath the prison and swiftly ascended the arch to the broad coping which ran above the colonnade. There it stood, faintly silhouetted against the gray masonry of the prison. It made motions, as of throwing. Something hard struck against the prison wall, and again upon the coping at the shadow's feet. The shadow bent, straightened, threw again—and this time there was no further sound save a faint click such as is caused by stone kissing iron.

Aidomar, the youth, nodded satisfaction, nodded more emphatically as the thin rope coiled in his hand was drawn up. He watched a scroll of white paper, tied into the rope, climb up the wall and jump into the barred window.

Presently he saw that window flash into yellow being for a moment as a match burned. With returning darkness, the thin rope began to snake upward again, followed by one much stronger, for which it had been the vanguard.

Aidomar watched the window. He saw the heavy rope drawn in. He saw the flicker of white hands as they fastened the rope to the massive iron bars. He caught glimpses of the face of John Stone, the American, behind those bars. Then, when there was no more motion, he slid from the edge of the coping, hung for a moment and dropped lightly to the ground, where Al-Lateef was awaiting him.

"All prepared, master," he whispered. "But, but those bars, Sidi, they are newly placed, as the mortar shows; set deep in stone. Aye, almost they would hold an elephant, I think—at least a small one."

"Now let us see," chuckled Al-Lateef, "whether they can hold a beast such as I am going to drive; such a little elephant as, at my request, you have borrowed from the American at El-K'sar for quite another purpose. Now let us see."

Cautiously he made fast a heavy looped rope to the base of one of the pillars of the arch. To this he attached the hook of a heavy tackle block, triple wheeled. The hook of the other block he connected with the rope which ran to the iron bars above. Swiftly he tautened the tackle, as tightly as he alone could pull it.

"Now," he said, when all was ready,

"we be two strong men, Aidomar. Seize hold this rope with me, brace yourself against this pillar, and let us see what says the elephant which has little wheels instead of big feet."

They settled themselves. They straightened their backs. They laid their muscles against the rope, and little by little the tackle took in the slack, the rope stretched to its maximum tension, bit into the edge of the coping and sent a little snowfall of mortar down upon them.

"Again," commanded Al-Lateef.

Another inch of rope came in.

"And now—again!"

Their muscles cracked.

"Ah-h-h!"

There was a sound of grating stones, small thuds upon the coping above them, a sudden loosening of the rope in their hands.

Rising, they went to look. The iron bars dangled a yard beneath the window, at the end of the smaller rope which the American had attached to prevent the noise of their falling. A man leaned out of the window. Then he drew back and immediately the bent iron bars ascended and disappeared within the window. A rope was thrown out, and a smaller one. Then John Stone appeared again, feet foremost; held on to the window ledge for a moment, and dropped.

The fall jarred him unmercifully, but he grinned cheerfully. It was worth the jar to cause bewilderment as to the manner of his escape. The iron bars were inside; there was no dangling rope to indicate outside help; the obvious conclusion would be that by incredible human strength he had torn the bars from his prison, cast them behind him and gone forth, a free man. He chuckled as he perceived, with prophetic vision, that a miracle would rise about his name—and in truth, in future months the tale went up and down the land and he was spoken of with awe as a Hercules reborn.

He slid over the coping, dropped, and his hand sought that of Al-Lateef.

But the Moor cut short the proffered thanks.

"Let us go at once," he said, "and finish that business which the machinations of our enemies has interrupted for a moment. Here is a *djellab* to cover you."

John Stone donned the garment. Then, side by side, they crossed the *sok* and were swallowed up by the black mouth of the gate.

FACTS AN' FIGGERS ON WOMEN

As Told by

Whiskers Beck to

ALAN LEMAY

I'M ONE o' the only three men in the world that can explain you all about women without gettin' in a fight o' some kind with somebody. The other two are dead. But they got theirselves elected to Congress before they passed in their checks.

There's lot o' things around a cow camp that women can do better than men. Take Madge Rutherford, the Old Man's dotter here at the Triangle R. I'll put a glass eye on the feller that says Madge ain't the finest youngster ever stood up. No, I won't, either. There's plenty o' young bucks standin' round ready to pass out the glass decoration an' I'm gettin' oldish, myself.

Well, like I started to say, take Madge. She can cinch up a mean bronc quicker'n any man on the place. Or take Strong-Arm Annie, over at Hinkly. She can tail down a steer so handy that the boys stand around aghast, you might say, an' let her handle the most of 'em, jest out o' admiration.

But there's other things women can't do fer shucks, an' one of 'em's cook. I mind the time I stopped over with Sniggle Slade, when he was livin' with his second wife—she's quit him now. Grub was gettin' low, so we decided we'd have some cake.

Miz Slade said—

"No can do," or words to that effec'. "There ain't nothin' to cook a cake with."

An' all the time there was flour an' beans an' salt pork an' m'lasses, t' say nothin' o' horse corn out in the barn.

Well, me an' Sniggles took the flour an' we mashed up some horse corn an' put it in to make it look yaller, an' we doped in a lot o' m'lasses, an' a lot o' chopped-up salt pork to make it rich, an' some whisky to make it rise good. An' after it begun to bake we put the beans on top, to make it fancy. An' we cooked that cake to a turn in the fryin' pan. An' when it was done, no more delicate or appetizin' morsel ever passed a man's whiskers. But Miz Slade wouldn't eat it; she said it wasn't nothin'.

Another thing women can't do is mend clo'es. I mind when Wild-Eye Bill got married the first time. He'd let his mendin' pile up on him fer months, figgerin' to have it done right. An' first on the list was his overalls. Well, Miz Wild-Eye took one look at them overalls an' throwed in her hand.

"What's them?" she asks, pertendin' ignorance.

"Them's my leadin' overalls," says Bill.

"The way to fix them," says Miz Wild-Eye, "is throw 'em out an' get new. I won't truck," says she, "with no such rags. They may 'a' ben overalls once, but now they ain't hardly even the place where a pair o' overalls was."

Well, now, that jest goes to show. Bill hadn't had them overalls more'n seven, eight years, on the outside, an' they was practic'ly like new. I guess the seat an'

knees was out, an' one leg might 'a' ben tore off, an' mebbe there was a few straps an' pieces missin' here an' there; but they was plenty good enough workin' basis fer anybody that really knew how to mend. Bill didn't argy. He jest went out an' picked up some oat sacks an' bindin' twine an' hay wire, an' fixed them overalls hisself. An' in a little while he had 'em so you wouldn't know they'd ever ben wore—hardly.

But if there's one thing a woman jest *can't* get the hang of, it's keepin' a house proper. A woman's idee o' keepin' a house straight is hide ever'thin' that's any mortal use. I mind Miz Harker. She used to keep pore Ed in a turmoil jest over that one point. She'd put all his clo'es in one pile, an' shove 'em under the bed. Then Ed would want, say, his next-best chaps, an' he'd reach under an' feel fer 'em an' bump his head an' cuss; an' fin'ly he'd lay hands on 'em an' give a jerk, an' out would come the whole smear an' fly all over the cabin—socks, shirts an' whatnot. Then mebbe you think there wouldn't be hell poppin'.

They fin'ly busted up because Miz Harker claimed Ed's one-hoss hayrake hadn't no place in a well ordered kitchen. He tried to show her where it was only a meedjum sized rake. But no, she wouldn't listen. An' Ed had to draw the line *some* place, so they busted up.

One thing that's hard fer a man to get used to in a woman is their croolty. Many's the time I've see Miz Wilkins run Bob Wilkins' boar pig right out o' the house into the goshawfulest kind o' weather. An' she does it to this day. Bob never could break her of it. Out goes the pig, leave the storm rage as it may.

You see that sad happenin' over an' over. There was Gash-Mouth Al an' his pet bull snake that had always slep' in Al's blanket to keep the rattlers off; an' the good luck tarantula that lived fer years in the crown o' Pete Arthur's hat, but had to hunt up a new home when Pete went to sparkin' the lady from Alamosa. I could name you sech misonderstandin's by the hour.

When Hawk DuSell was boardin' at Pussyfoot Moon's, he claimed Miz Moon never give him no peace. She always wanted to sweep right where he was settin'. No matter where he moved to, she always follered him up with the broom. Fin'ly Hawk put his chair on the table, an' that's what got him in hot water. He says, well, he had to have *some* place to set. An' she compared him to a old hen. An' he says—

"Speak fer yourself."

So she shot him, an' she done right, too. He didn't have no sense; if he'd had any sense he would 'a' gone out an' set in the stable in the first place.

Me, I always got along fine with women. I dunno of no nicer place to set of a evenin' than on the top of a fence—I mean rail fence, not this here argyin' wire—with a purty girl alongside. Pervidin' it ain't rainin'.

But when she goes on the warpath, best be like me. Jest kind o' edge toward your hoss, casual; an' when you see your chance, make a break fer it. Then spur fer your life, brother, an' you won't make no mistake.

Part II of

MAVERICKS

By W. C. TUTTLE

ABOUT sundown one day, three men rode up to an old shack, somewhere near the Painted Desert in the Southwest. One of the men swayed in his saddle—he had been shot while the three were relieving a stage of two hundred pounds of raw gold.

The three men, who addressed one another as Ed and Steve and Spike, dismounted. And in the cabin they found two healthy infants. Spike could hardly talk.

"Don't let the law get 'em," he managed. "I'm a goner, boys. Take my share of the gold and the kids and send 'em to my sister in—in Denver. Her name's Mrs. Dan Lawton . . ."

Ed and Steve left him for dead and later lost the gold when they were flushed by a posse—but saved the babies . . .

About twenty years later Steve Pelliser, owner of the SP ranch, gave a party in honor of Mary, his daughter, and Edward Hart, president of the Bank of Willow Wells. It was Hart's nineteenth wedding anniversary and his wife had, years before, set Pelliser and himself up in business.

Pink Lowry, deputy sheriff of Willow Wells, had dressed particularly for the bright eye of Mary; and his costume brought forth a sarcastic remark from Jim McGowan, owner of the Diamond R outfit.

McGowan was an unwelcome suitor for Mary's hand.

Pink, unhappy, left the house. He was standing out by the stable when a bullet smacked into a post beside him. He drew his own gun and fired at the flash—and Jim McGowan stopped the bullet.

After the coroner's inquest, which proved that Pink had killed in self-defense, Scotty McGowan, Jim's brother, swore that the affair had not seen its finish yet. While Pelliser was talking over the tragedy with Dud Evans, the sheriff, a stranger rode up to the hitchrack before the War Paint Saloon. In dismounting he fell beneath the hoofs of Pelliser's horse and was kicked into insensibility. When he returned to consciousness he gave his name as Smith. It was accepted, for his face had been so changed by the accident that recognition was impossible.

William Allen McGill came to High Grade to find out who he was. In the private papers of his father, a deceased San Francisco doctor, he had discovered old letters from a man named Ed, inquiring about a boy named Bill—asking that good care be taken of him. He had one clue to work on—a few shares of mining stock in the Willow Valley Copper Company.

In High Grade he was framed as a horsethief by a pair of rascals and only by the intervention of Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens was he saved from parting with his entire fortune—some five hundred dollars. William was grateful and he told the friendly punchers his story.

They decided to accompany him to Willow Wells.

In Cinnabar, where they put up for the

A Novel of Hashknife and Sleepy

night, their horses were stolen. Hashknife had a hunch. He agreed to the outrageous price asked for horses by the hotel keeper, and borrowed money enough from Bill McGill to make the purchase. Then he sent Bill along the road—alone. He and Sleepy dropped off into a little swale.

"We're here for the day, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "A day of rest won't hurt either of us."

CHAPTER VII

BILL FOLLOWS HIS NOSE

IT WAS after dark when Hashknife and Sleepy rode back to Cinnabar. They dismounted near the stable, from which their horses had been taken, and found the door locked. Hashknife secured a length of two-by-four and pried loose the staple, letting the door swing open. Cautiously they scratched

matches and looked around. Ghost was in the first stall, and in the two rear stalls were Sleepy's and Bill's animals, contentedly chewing hay.

They led them outside and tied them to an old fence, with the horses they had ridden.

"Now for the dirty work," laughed Hashknife, as they headed back for the street. "I reckon I've read the signs pretty plain, this far."

"You shore have," chuckled Sleepy.

The proprietor of the hotel was sitting on a bench in front of the building, smoking a pipe, when Hashknife and Sleepy found him. He got one look at their faces in the light from his window, and started to his feet.

"Go ahead!" said Hashknife softly. "We'll talk to you in the house."

The man went in. He was a poor actor, showing his indignation before any one had accused him of doing wrong. There was a big six-shooter on a little shelf behind the desk, but he was unarmed. Sleepy immediately appropriated the gun, much to the man's chagrin.

"You owe us four hundred and fifty dollars," said Hashknife calmly.

"You—I owe you? What for?"

"We brought your horses back. Didn't like 'em."

"Oh! You didn't like 'em, eh? Well, mebbe I've got three better—"

"Out in your stable, eh? Oh, yeah, we know all about it. Give me that money right now, or we're all fixed to treat you like we usually treat horsethieves. I knew you had 'em. Happens to be your business, eh? Steal a guest's horse and sell him another for ten times what it's worth. Well, you're all through. You've given me a bill of sale for three stolen horses—enough to send you up for a lot of years. Give me that money, you danged crook!"

The man groaned but produced the money, and Hashknife counted it carefully before pocketing it.

"As I said before," continued Hashknife, "you're all through. We'll be seein' the sheriff in a short time and give him this bill of sale, along with a story about this last deal. If he don't run you out or in, we'll be along in a week or so and do the job up right. As long as we don't know the morals of this town, you better go and see us pull out."

The man realized that he was getting off cheaply, so made no objections. Hashknife replaced the staple in the door and they locked the proprietor in his own stable before they rode away to join Bill.

"I've never seen such a damn' country," declared Sleepy. "Have you got to sleep with your horse to keep him?"

"Looks thataway. I've heard of this game bein' played, but this is the first time I ever had it played on me. You see, the man wasn't concerned enough about our loss, and was too anxious to sell us horses. When he asked such a price, I could *sabe* his game. He didn't seem to have anybody workin' for him, so I figured he was holdin' them broncs out in the brush, and wouldn't bring 'em in before dark."

"You shore can figure," said Sleepy. "I was blamin' that jigger from High Grade."

"Nope. If it had been him, the hotel man would have been surprised. We better hightail out of here and pick up Bill. He's probably scared to death by this time, all alone out there in the dark."

"Are we goin' over to Willow Wells, Hashknife?"

"Well, why not? We've got to see this kid safe, ain't we? He's the first person that ever let me walk away with his money, and I'm kinda strong for him. We don't think he knows much and he probably thinks we're about the most ignorant people he ever met. Let's stop and take the ropes off them valuable horses."

"He'll probably pick 'em up again."

"That jigger," said Hashknife, "is goin' away from here. He may rent out his horse stealin' concession on a royalty basis, but I'll betcha ten to one that he won't be here longer than it takes to pack up and get out."

"What'll we do in Willow Valley?"

"I dunno, pardner. Let's wait and see what Willow Valley does to us."

They released the extra horses at the point where they struck the old road to Willow Valley, and from there they kept a sharp outlook for Bill McGill. They did not expect him to go more than a mile or so along the old road, which was little more than a pair of ancient ruts.

But after a couple of miles, during which time they made enough noise to attract Bill's attention, in case he was along that part of the road, they began to wonder what had become of him.

Hashknife dismounted and examined the road by the light of a match. There was one set of horse tracks heading east along the road.

"He passed here," Hashknife decided as they rode on. "Probably ain't got no idea of distance, or wanted to get plumb away from Cinnabar before he tied up."

They rode along steadily for another hour, stopping at times to look at the tracks.

"That," said Hashknife, "has got me fightin' my hat. What's the idea of that kid runnin' away from us?"

"Search me," said Sleepy. "His horse was the only one over that road, back where we started, and the tracks are still goin' ahead. Do you reckon he kinda got buck fever and was scared to stop? Or mebbe when it got a little dark he was afraid we might have been doublecrossin' him and wasn't goin' to meet him? You never can tell what a feller like him is goin' to think next."

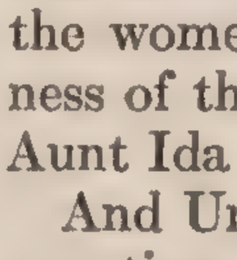
"Yeah, that's true. I suppose the only thing to do is to foller him. If it wasn't that I had his money, we'd go on back and let him sail his own ship; but I don't want his money."

Hashknife examined the tracks again.

"Travelin' slow," he said. "We might catch up with him, if he didn't start until dark; but we don't know when he started. Well, it don't matter; we'll find him tomorrow."

"He deserves a poke in the nose," said Sleepy. "If he'd kept out of this country we'd be on our way north."

"Yeah, that's true; but what's the difference? What's a few days, more or less? And we've never seen Willow Valley."



UNCLE HODDY stood at the bar in the War Paint and tried to get a good view of himself in the back bar mirror. But the image was just a trifle blurred, except when he closed one eye. Uncle Hoddy was drunk, but he could not even admit it to himself. He looked curiously at Hank Blue and Jerry Dole, two of the SP cowboys, who had helped put him in this condition.

Uncle Hoddy was drunk, which in itself was a disgraceful condition; but the worst of the matter was that Aunt Ida was down at the church, where several of the women were conferring on the business of the Ladies' Aid Society, of which Aunt Ida was an active member.

And Uncle Hoddy might expect her at any time. He had not imbibed such an awful lot, but he remembered that he had forgotten to eat at noon. His empty stomach had given the liquor a good chance to get in its evil work.

"You look," said Hank thickly, "as though you had sheen a ghos'."

"I have. Wha's in that liquor, anyway?"

"Nothin'. You're drunk, Hoddy."

"Lizzen," Hoddy said owlishly. "Hank, 'll you do me fav'r? Look across street at my buckboard. 'F my wife's in it, I'm shunk like the *Mer'mac*."

"She ain't there," declared Hank, who was a little better off than Hoddy, although Hank and Jerry had been drinking long before Hoddy had arrived.

"Good. You're a nice feller, Hank. What'll you have?"

"I'm almos' to capacity. You see, me and Jerry came to town to git some flour. T'day is the day One Hop cooks bread, and he was shy on flour. Tha's why me and Jerry's ridin' a buckboard."

"Was that t'day?" asked Jerry.

"This mornin'."

"My, my, my! Hank, we better go home. I'm broke, anyway."

"Well, let's have one more," suggested

Hank. "Uncle Hoddy buys the las' one and then we go home—all of us."

They drank to each other. Uncle Hoddy blinked foolishly, wiped the back of his right hand across his lips, while he clung to the bar with his other. Hank took another look through the window.

"She's there," he announced.

"Eh?" Uncle Hoddy stared at him.

"Aunt Ida's in your buckboard, Hoddy."

"My Gawd! And me in thish position. Well—" he tried to shrug his thin shoulders and almost fell down— "I'm jis' right to abshorb a lecture on my failin' morals. It'll hit me and bounce right off. Is she lookin' thish way?"

"She wasn't when I looked."

"Good! Gen'lemen, I am shorry I have but one life to give— Well, tha's all right. I'll shay good af'ernoon to you all."

Uncle Hoddy adjusted the tie he did not have on and went out to the street, where he got his bearings all lined up, then proceeded to miss the buckboard by twenty feet. Aunt Ida did not see him until he passed the rig, and then her backbone stiffened visibly. Hoddy managed to stop at the edge of the wooden sidewalk, where he grinned foolishly at her; foolishly and fearfully. For more years than she would ever admit, she had preached temperance to him to no avail. Two more of her sisters of the Aid were coming out of the store, and the disgrace was almost too much.

She sprang down, untied the team quickly, got back into the buckboard and drove toward home alone; while Uncle Hoddy, shocked beyond words, stood there and watched her drive away. It was the first time she had ever done such a thing. He sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and held his head in his hands.

Hank and Jerry had watched the drama from the safe confines of the War Paint, but now they came over to offer their sympathy.

"I'm shorry, but I'm glad," said Uncle Hoddy. "Shorry she left me on foot, but glad she didn't preach. I suppose I've got that part comin'."

"She don't 'preciate you," said Jerry, who was a bit wobbly.

"Never did. That is, she never did 'preciate my thirst. I guess the res' of me is all right."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Hank. "She'll be comin' back after you, Hoddy. You re'lize that, don'tcha? Well, you won't be here."

"Where'll I be?"

"Out to the SP ranch. Ride out with me and Jerry and the flour."

"Tha's good idea. By grab, I'll learn her to leave me. C'mon."

It was only after much earnest labor that they managed to get on the buckboard seat. There were three sacks of flour in the back, and two sacks under their feet. The old springs sagged dangerously under the weight, and the half broken team wanted to run.

Hank managed to curb their desire until they were a mile out of town, when Jerry complained about their snail-like pace, grabbed the lines away from Hank and dropped one of them. The sudden movement behind them was enough to startle the team. Away they went, with Jerry hanging to the one line, and all three men hanging to each other to keep upright. The road was crooked but flat, and the brush grew close to the sides. Jerry did not try to guide them. They were cold jawed brutes, anyway, and they wanted to run. The road was sandy and the runaway made little sound, above the squeal of the dry axles.

The two horses were running as fast as they could, the wheels of the buckboard showering the brush with sand at every curve, when suddenly both animals shied to the right, and three men, with three sacks of flour, went high into the air and came down in a heap.

One sack caught on a mesquite snag, ripped half open, and its contents descended like an avalanche. The team kept right on going. When the cloud of dust and flour blew aside there stood Bill McGill in the middle of the road, in the same position as when the team shied away from him.

BILL had lost his hat, his pants were torn, shirt ripped, and he was carrying one boot in his hand. His face and hands were burned a bright red and his nose looked like a pickled beet. Taken altogether, Bill McGill did not greatly resemble the William Allen McGill of San Francisco.

Hank was the first to recover. He came up like a snowman. His face was white and his collar was full of flour. He blew disgustedly and the blast left a dark streak up his face. Then he sneezed. Bill McGill jerked slightly. Up came Hoddy. He was also white, until he drew a sleeve across his face, leaving part of his features exposed. Then came Jerry. The only reason why his face was not white was that Jerry had landed face down. The three of them gazed at Bill, and Bill gazed at them.

"There's the devil," grunted Jerry. "I reckon we all got killed."

"I'm William Allen McGill," said Bill, slowly and distinctly.

The three men looked at one another.

"T' meetcha," said Jerry, bobbing his head.

"What're you doin' out there?" asked Hoddy. "Was it you that scared our team off the road?"

"They went off that way," said Bill, pointing. "I suppose that is the team to which you refer."

"Have you scared other teams today?" asked Hank curiously.

"No, sir. I—I just found this road."

"Was it lost?" asked Jerry.

"I was lost, I suppose."

"Mm-m-m. Too damn' bad you didn't stay lost—until we got past you. Where do you think you're goin'?"

"I haven't any idea."

The three men, nearly sobered by their fall, came out through the brush and looked at Bill.

"In a couple days you're goin' to peel off," said Hank, looking at Bill's red face and hands. "Where's your hat?"

"I lost it."

"Uh-huh. Foot sore?"

"Very. In fact, I am afraid it is one mass of blisters. That is why I am not wearing my boot."

"I'd judge that's why. Belong around here?"

Bill shook his head slowly.

"I don't believe I do."

"Maverick," pronounced Jerry.

"McGill," corrected Bill quickly.

"Well, hell!" snorted Hoddy. "Let's stop gassin' and find that team."

"We'll find 'em at the ranch-house gate," said Hank. "Steve will be there and fire me and Jerry. He said he'd tie a can on us if we ever got drunk again durin' the month."

"Is this durin' the month?" asked Jerry.

"It's the fifteenth."

"Goodby job. Well, I been meanin' to move on, anyway. I ain't wed to no job."

"I'm still lost," said Bill helplessly.

Hank got a sudden idea.

"Let's take him back to the ranch. Mebbe Steve will git to laughin' and forget to fire us."

"Shore," agreed Jerry quickly. "C'mon, redskin. We'll paint you up with vaseline and you won't pain yourself so much."

"I should be very grateful. You see, I have been walking since early last evening. Luckily I found two places where water oozed from the ground, and was able to get a drink. But at one place some cows chased me and I was obliged to seek safety in a tree."

"Where the hell did you come from?" asked Hank.

"I believe the town was Cinnabar."

"You walked from Cinnabar?"

"Well, I ran a little, you see."

"Didn't you have no horse?"

"Well, I did have. You see, I loaned two men four hundred and fifty dollars to purchase three horses. One of these horses was given to me and I was instructed to wait for them along an old road. It was after dark, when a man came along. I made myself known to him, and he—he knocked me down, robbed me of my remaining money and took my horse. So, I walked."

The three men looked at one another seriously and then looked at Bill. Bill was not lying and they knew it.

"That's why I've allus wanted to git away from here and into a place like Cinnabar, where there's opportunities," said Jerry sadly.

"And so you walked, eh?" mused Hank.

"Yes. I didn't want to go back. You see, they tried to arrest me for stealing horses in High Grade."

"Didja?"

"No. I merely purchased a stolen horse."

"Feller," grinned Jerry, "you've been livin' a fast pace."

"But I was innocent."

"Anybody could look at you and see that. What didja say your name was?"

"Is," corrected Bill. "My name is—I am known as William Allen McGill."

"Well, Bill, I'd like you to meet Hank Blue, Uncle Hoddy Noon and Jerry Dole. I'm Dole."

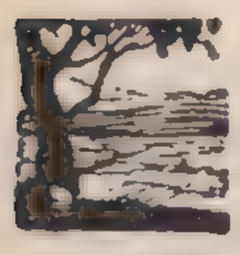
"I'm certainly pleased to make your acquaintance, gentlemen."

"Do you drink?" asked Uncle Hoddy.

"Why, I—I never have—not intoxicating liquors."

Hoddy shook his head sadly.

"Gotta keep him away from my wife. All she needs is a howlin' example to point out what I might be like if I didn't drink. Let's go. I'll borry a horse from Steve to ride home."



THEY plodded along the hot road, with Bill bringing up the rear. He was hardly able to navigate, but he did not complain. He had been alone so long that his aches and pains were forgotten in the pleasurable knowledge that he was again among human beings.

The team had gone home, and Sid Brayton had unhitched them. The front axle had been badly sprung and several spokes knocked from the wheels, but otherwise the equipage was intact. The harness was broken in a few places, but that could be easily repaired. Steve Pelliser was not at home, but Mary was there.

They walked up to the porch, where she was standing. Mary knew what had happened; knew that Hank and Jerry had got drunk and let the team run away. And it was not difficult for her to imagine that Uncle Hoddy had been drinking with them. They were still covered with flour.

Bill McGill stopped at the bottom step and stared at Mary. He was still carrying one boot in his hand, and most of the sock on that foot was gone.

"Miss Pelliser," said Hank gravely, "lemme make you used to Bill McGill. He's somethin' we found in the road jist after the smash. Bill, this is Miss Pelliser."

"I am certainly pleased to meet you, Miss Pelliser," said Bill.

Mary checked a smile. It was easy to see that Bill McGill was not a product of the cattle country. His nose was swelling from sunburn, and there was a suspicion that Bill's entire face might change contour from the scorching it had received.

"He walked all the way from Cinnabar," offered Jerry.

"Said he run part of the way," said Uncle Hoddy seriously. "How are you, Mary?"

"Fine, Uncle Hoddy. How is Aunt Ida?"

"Full of aches."

"She isn't sick, is she?"

"Mentally. I took a couple drinks, and she drove home without me."

Mary smiled with complete understanding; she turned to Bill.

"You better come in and let me dope up your face, Mr. McGill. You are not accustomed to an Arizona sun, I am afraid."

Bill grinned foolishly.

"I lost my hat last night. But I—I do not wish to bother any one with my troubles."

"No trouble," said Mary. "I'll get some olive oil from One Hop. It will stop the burning very quickly."

She went back into the house and Bill sank down on the steps. He was about at the end of his endurance.

"I reckon I better borry a bronc and

head for home," said Uncle Hoddy. "Might as well get it over with. I've got jist so much comin' to me, and the sooner it's over the better I'll be feelin'. A man is a fool to drink."

"Why do you drink?" asked Bill indifferently.

"You and my wife would make a damn' good team! That question was old when them hills out there was holes in the ground, and no man has ever been wise enough to answer it correctly. And is it any of your business?"

"None," replied Bill dully.

"Then you won't team with my wife worth a dang. Gimme a horse, Hank."

The three of them wandered down to the stable. Mary came out with the olive oil bottle. Bill was really a pitiful sight. His ears were one mass of blisters, and his eyes were beginning to puff badly. Mary looked him over thoughtfully.

"Young man," she said, as though she were old enough to be his mother, "you are a fit subject for a hospital. Come in the house."

He stumbled in after her, and she led him to a cool bedroom at the rear of the old ranch-house. Then she called to One Hop, the Chinese cook, who came shuffling in, grinning widely. She handed him the bottle and pointed at Bill.

"As soon as he is undressed you sop this oil all over his burns. Give him plenty. And you better fix up his foot, too. That's all blistered."

"Yes'm." One Hop bobbed his head. "Plenty oil on head. Velly bad. Fix up foot, yes'm."

"How long since you ate a meal, Mr. McGill?"

"Yesterday morning, Miss Pelliser," Bill answered weakly.

"I fix meal," said One Hop. "Fix head and foot, fix meal. Yessa."

"Oh, I don't want to be a bother," said Bill wearily.

"Where do you think you are—in a city?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Mighty nice of you."

"Rats!" said Mary inelegantly. "We even doctor sick calves. You let One Hop fix you up. He's good at such things. You better eat something and then take a good sleep. No one will bother you here."

"I don't suppose I can ever repay you. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't met those men. I'm really going blind."

"Plenty swell," grinned One Hop. "All lite tomalla, mebbe."

Mary walked out and closed the door. She was sitting on the porch when her father came up from the stable, still wearing his chaps and gun. He had been told about the tenderfoot. Mary explained his condition and what she had done with him.

"That's fine," said her father. "Poor devil needs attention, I reckon. Well, Hank and Jerry have quit the job."

"Quit?"

He nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes. The last time they got drunk and smashed up a rig, I told 'em that if they ever done it again I'd fire the pair of 'em. Well, they smashed another rig today—and quit. I wouldn't have fired 'em, but I suppose it's just as well."

"Leaves us rather short handed, Daddy."

"Yeah, that's true; but we'll get along. They've been wantin' to go up into Wyomin' for quite awhile. Hank's got a brother up in the Wind River country."

"Did you see Uncle Hoddy?"

"No. He got away just ahead of me." Steve Pelliser laughed. "I'd like to be a mouse in the wall when Hoddy meets Aunt Ida. But she's to blame for a lot of it. A man don't like to be preached to all the time. She talks liquor to him so often that he gets thirsty. What's the name of this young bunch of sunburn you've adopted?"

"I never adopted him. His name is McGill—Bill McGill."

"Yea-a-ah? Bill McGill, eh? Where's he from?"

"I didn't ask him."

"What business is he in?"

"Would it have been polite for me to ask him those questions?"

"No, I reckon not. Bill McGill. Don't sound like a tenderfoot."

"Sounds are deceiving—he *is*."

"Evidently. Good lookin'?" Steve smiled teasingly.

"Can't tell until the swelling goes down."

"M-m-m. One Hop doctorin' him, I suppose. Prob'ly file up some cowhorn and give it to him for his liver. Well, I've got to dig up some money for them rig bustin' punchers. Where's your derelict, Mary?"

"In the back bedroom—and you keep out of there. He couldn't see you anyway, because his eyes are swelled shut. Let One Hop take care of him."

"Pshaw, I wasn't goin' to bother him. He's your find, my dear."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Hm-m-m! I'll betcha the boy's got possibilities."

CHAPTER VIII

HASHKNIFE AND SLEEPY HIRE OUT

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy trailed that single horse track almost through to the east side of the range before they happened to discover that there was also a man's track in the old road. They were on the down slope into Willow Valley when Hashknife dismounted, scratched another match and found the mark of a boot sole in some soft ground. It was not the mark of a cowboy boot.

"He's prob'ly leadin' his horse," suggested Sleepy; and Hashknife agreed that this was probable.

Then they came to the point where the road was no more. It seemed to reach a spot where the old ruts fanned out in every direction, obliterated within a few yards. Here they lost the tracks in the dark, and decided to wait until daylight. Neither of them knew anything about the Valley, and they were very sure that Bill McGill knew no more than they.

"All I want to do is to catch the darn' fool and give him his money and horse," said Hashknife. "After that, I'm all through with Bill McGill."

Daylight revealed no signs of habitation, and they spent several hours trying to trail Bill's tracks. Once they found them near an old waterhole, where the spoor showed that Bill drank from a trickle of water in a cow track. There were several white faced steers at the hole, and Hashknife wondered how Bill had fared with them. Range cattle are a dangerous proposition to a man on foot, and there was no sign of Bill's horse near the spring.

Near the spring grew a gnarled old cottonwood, and it was here that Sleepy found Bill's hat, which he tied to his saddle.

"I'll betcha them pale faced steers chased Willyum up that tree, and he was so scared when he got down that he forgot his hat."

Hashknife examined the ground beneath the tree for hoof marks, thinking that Bill might have tied his horse to the tree before he got his drink, but there were only fresh cow tracks.

"Bill's on foot, I'll betcha," he decided. "Horse prob'ly dumped him off."

"And with all these range stock scattered around here," said Sleepy, "he'll have plenty footrace practise before he finds a house."

They headed east, following down the draws, looking everywhere for Bill; but they did not find any more trace of him. Then they struck the HN ranch just before Uncle Hoddy got home from the SP. Aunt Ida was sitting on the porch of the rambling old ranch-house, hymn book in hand. Caliente and Piute were sitting on the corral fence, and Chris Halvorsen was squatted in the shade of a wagon near the stable.

They all knew that Aunt Ida had come home without Uncle Hoddy, and that meant they were all in for services in case they got near the house. The two strange cowboys rode in at the big gate and up to the porch. Aunt Ida looked them over severely as they removed their hats.

"Howdy, ma'am." Hashknife smiled.

"You ain't seen a young man limpin' around here minus a hat, have you?"

Aunt Ida shook her head slowly. She did not understand what he meant.

"We lost one like that," said Sleepy. "What ranch is this, ma'am?"

"This is the HN."

"Are you the boss?" asked Hashknife.

Aunt Ida shut her lips tightly for a moment or two.

"I am."

"Uh-huh—I thought you was. Which way is the nearest town?"

She pointed east.

"Take the road out past the stable. It leads directly to Willow Wells."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am."

At this particular moment Uncle Hoddy rode past the stable. He was mounted on a scraggly roan. Aunt Ida got to her feet, watching him. He rode in through the wide gate, stopped and looked from the stable to the house. Then he reined his horse toward the house and came up to the two cowboys.

"Howdy?" said Hashknife.

Uncle Hoddy squinted at Hashknife, shifted his eyes quickly to Aunt Ida and replied—

"Not so very good, I guess."

"Get off that horse and come in here," ordered Aunt Ida.

The old man sighed deeply, shook one foot loose from his stirrup, started to dismount, but changed his mind.

"Nope," he said defiantly. "I don't reckon I will."

"Won't you?"

"I won't! I tell you I've been thinkin' a lot. When a man's as old as I am, he's old enough to know what he wants to do. You go right ahead and rant about it if you want to."

"And right in front of strangers," wailed Aunt Ida, who felt herself slipping.

"Then you go in the house," advised Uncle Hoddy. "I never picked this time and place f'r my declaration of independence. You started it."

He turned to the two cowboys, his face very determined.

"I've been temperanced for over thirty years, gents. Every time I get a few drinks I'm lectured to death. Ma's a Ladies' Aider. She's got the worst damn' case of ingrown religion you ever heard about, and her particular mission on earth is to fight whisky. Know what I mean? Well, the war is over. Hoddy Noon has done turned like a worm. I own this ranch and I do as I please, datin' from right now. What can I do for you, boys?"

The comedy of the situation choked Hashknife; but the tragedy kept back his smile. Aunt Ida was staring at Hoddy, her lips twitching. It was the war of the rebellion, and she saw her forces scattered. She knew Hoddy Noon to be a very determined man who had let her run roughshod over him all these years, as far as his thirst was concerned.

"Ma," he said gently, "you go in the house—you're whipped."

She turned slowly and went into the house, leaving her hymnal on the railing of the porch. There was no triumph in the old man's face—only determination.

"We just stopped to inquire the way to Willow Wells," said Hashknife.

The old rancher pointed past the stable.

"That's the road out there. Better git down and wait fer meal-time."

"Thanks," smiled Hashknife, "but we'll be travelin'. My name's Hartley, and my pardner's name is Stevens."

"Mine's Noon," said the old man. "Hoddy Noon. I own this HN ranch—and I boss it, too."

"I'll betcha. Well, we'll mebbe see you again, Mr. Noon."

"Shore. Come out any time."

They left the place and headed for Willow Wells.

"You've just watched a tragedy," said Hashknife.

Sleepy nodded slowly.

"I wanted to laugh, but I couldn't."

"The turning of the worm," smiled Hashknife. "I've heard of it, but this was an actual demonstration. They'll be a lot happier, and he won't get thirsty near so often."

THEY rode to Willow Wells and stabled the three horses. Their main object was to get a big meal and they found it in the little restaurant next door to the War Paint. Filled with food once more, they naturally gravitated to the sheriff's office, seeking information of Bill McGill.

Pink Lowry was there, but he had not seen the boy. Hashknife explained how they had lost Bill, and Pink was interested. He knew the hotel keeper at Cinnabar.

"He's out of our jurisdiction," Pink told Hashknife. "He ought to be put in jail for that job. Hundred and fifty for a bronc! No wonder you suspected him of crooked work. What do you reckon became of your friend?"

"That's what we're wonderin'. I've got four hundred and fifty dollars of his money."

"He sure must be a friend."

"Well, he's a trustin' soul, that's a cinch."

They were standing in the doorway, when two of the Diamond R cowboys rode in, accompanied by a rider who was a stranger to Pink. Hashknife looked quickly at Sleepy, who was watching the riders as they dismounted at the War Paint. The third man was the pseudo sheriff of High Grade, whom the other two men had designated as Lee.

"That's Buck Haskell and Barney East of the Diamond R, but I dunno the other feller," said Pink. Sleepy had recognized him, and his brows lifted with amusement.

Dud Evans, the sheriff, came from the War Paint, and Pink introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy. Pink explained what had happened to them at Cinnabar, and the sheriff seemed to derive a certain amount of amusement from the story. But he had not seen or heard anything of Bill McGill.

They decided to stay long enough to give Bill a chance to show up and collect his money, and the sheriff assured them that if Bill did not appear within a day or so they would go hunting for him.

It was about an hour later when Hank Blue and Jerry Dole came to town from the SP, on their way out of the Valley. Hank told Pink that he and Jerry had quit their jobs, and Pink told Hashknife about it.

"There's a chance for you two to grab jobs, Hartley. Pelliser is a fine feller to work for and he's got a good outfit. Feed fine, and he's no slave driver. Bosses his own outfit, too. No women, except his daughter, and she's fine."

"We could use a couple of jobs," admitted Hashknife. "Of course, we might not stay more than a few months. We never stay anywhere longer than that."

"Why not?" asked Pink, not intending to be curious.

"Because when the Lord built this land, He put two sides to every hill, and He constructed us so we could only see one side at a time."

"I don't quite *sabe* your idea," admitted Pink.

"The other side of the hill. Didn't you ever wonder what's on the other side?"

"I never was much of a hand to wonder about things."

"Then you've missed a lot out of life, pardner."

Pink grinned widely as he looked Hashknife over, wondering what this tall, lean faced cowboy with the level gray eyes had ever discovered on the other side of the hill.

"You never laid up much of a bankroll, didja, Hartley?"

Hashknife jingled a few silver dollars in his pocket.

"Enough for today—who can tell about tomorrow? What is tomorrow? Ain't it the other side of a hill? There's lotsa hills in the life of a man, Lowry. Some of 'em are just bumps."

"Yeah, I suppose that's true. But don'tcha ever expect to settle down?"

"Who knows what a man may do?"

"I'd want a home."

"I'd like to have one," said Sleepy wistfully.

"Be fine," nodded Hashknife. "We

could come back every couple years for a few days rest."

"If we happened to be in that part of the country," Sleepy smiled.

"Well, what do you get out of life?" asked Pink. "I don't see your idea."

"It's somethin' like a little poem a feller up in Wyomin' wrote. I remember a couple verses, which go like this:

"There's a hill ahead,
But the land beyond
Stretches we know not where.
But there're trails we know,
So ahead we go,
To see what's over there.

"We may find peace,
Or we might find war,
Desert or fertile plain;
But whatever we find,
We'll leave it behind,
And head for a hill again."

"I reckon I know what you mean." Pink laughed. "But I'd rather marry and settle down. There's no money in ramblin' around."

"Not a cent," admitted Hashknife. "If you want money, stick to the job."

"Didn't you ever figure what's to become of you when you git old?"

"Used to. But me and Sleepy will never get old. Somebody will kill both of us before we're gray."

"What business are you in, Hartley?"

"Everybody's."

Which was very true, in a way. Hashknife Hartley, christened Henry, was born in Montana; on the Milk River, to be exact. His father was an itinerant preacher, blessed with a big family. So big, in fact, that Henry started to work at a tender age, in order to reduce expenses.

Life had given him many hard knocks before he became a tophand. He had drifted into the Southwest, finally working on the big ranch which gave him his nickname. Here he had met Sleepy Dave Stevens, who hailed from Idaho, and together they started out to see the other side of the hill.

Their trails had led from Canada to Mexico. At times they worked for the law and with the law, and on their back trails their name was anathema to those who worked outside the law. Marked men, were these two.

Sleepy did not do much thinking. He laughed his way along, playing the game for the love of it until Hashknife told him that the end of the trail was near. That meant that if fate were kind, they would soon head for another hill.

It was not a remunerative occupation. They had less money now than they had that first day they rode away together. Their needs were few, and they did not want to be thanked for what they did. Fate had thrown them into Willow Valley, but there was no work for them to do, no mystery to be solved.

It was late in the afternoon when Steve Pelliser came to Willow Wells. Dud Evans ran into him in a store, and during their conversation Dud told him that he had heard about Hank and Jerry quitting their jobs.

"Leaves you short handed, don't it?" asked the sheriff.

"Sure does—but I'll get along. Good men are scarce around here."

"There's a couple of strange cowboys in town. I dunno anythin' about 'em. but they'll prob'ly be lookin' for a job."

"Strangers, eh? I dunno, Dud; I'm kinda particular."

"Well, you might talk to 'em. They seem all right. Got mixed up with some sort of a dude over at Cinnabar and lost track of him. Feller named McGill, or somethin' like that."

"Good Lord, he's out at my place! Mary and One Hop have him in bed out there, doctorin' him for sunburn and blisters. Hank and Jerry and Uncle Hoddy found him between here and the ranch. Mebbe we better tell these boys where he is."

They found Hashknife, Sleepy and Pink at the War Paint, playing pool. The sheriff introduced Pelliser to the two cowboys and told them about Bill McGill.

"Well, that's great," laughed Hashknife. "I'm shore glad he fell into good hands."

"Is he one of your outfit?" asked Steve.

"No, he ain't part of any outfit—he's a lone wolf," said Hashknife. "He loaned me four hundred and fifty dollars, and I want to give it back to him. I've also got a horse that belongs to him."

"He *loaned* you four hundred and fifty dollars, and you're huntin' for him to give it back?"

"Shore—and I want to give him his horse."

"Are you two boys lookin' for jobs?"

Hashknife grinned slowly, examining the tip of his cue carefully.

"Well," he said finally, "we might work a while, Mr. Pelliser. Just at present our finances ain't a burden to us. When do we start?"

"You're already started." Pelliser grinned. "Get your horses and go out to the ranch with me."

"All right—shore."

"And just what else do you know about this sunburned McGill?"

"Not enough to talk about it. He'll prob'ly tell you as soon as his fire dies down. Queer sort of a jigger, Bill is. William Allen McGill, if I remember rightly, and he talks like he had swallered a dictionary. But you'll like Bill. Wait'll we shoot out this game and we'll be with you as thick as horseflies in May. Your shot, Pink."

CHAPTER IX

GHOSTS

"HE SAID his name was Smith, that he needed a job, so I gave him one." Thus Scotty McGowan summarized his reasons for hiring the man who had been almost kicked to death that night at the War Paint hitchrack.

It was a week after the arrival of Hashknife and Sleepy. Smith's face had healed up well, but twisted from the deep cuts, which gave him a perpetual leering expression. The old doctor was glad to get rid of him, and would receive no recompense from Steve Pelliser. Smith did not even thank the doctor, which was very ungrateful on his part; but the doctor's only comment was that the man had soured on the world and was not entirely responsible. Scotty McGowan could use another man at the Diamond R, so Smith got the job.

Hashknife and Sleepy liked their places at the SP ranch, and those of the ranch liked them. It did not take Steve Pelliser long to discover that he had two men who were not only cowpunchers but men who knew cattle. Thursday Adams, who was past fifty and had lived all those fifty years in the range country, said of Hashknife and Sleepy:

"I dunno where they came from, Steve, but somebody is shy a couple good hands. Sid Brayton told Hashknife that there wasn't a puncher in the State that could stay six jumps on that roan Bucket o' Blood bronc; and this mornin' at daylight I seen Hashknife sneak out with nothin' on but his undershirt, overalls and boots.

"I wondered where he was goin', so I peeked out the winder. Pretty soon I sees him comin' out with that man killin' roan all saddled. And you know what a job it is to saddle that brute, Steve. Well, he cramps that roan almost double, slips into the saddle and gives the roan his head.

"Did they go high? I'd tell a man! He bucked that animal plumb down to the willers and back ag'in, fannin' his ears. Then he yanked off the saddle and came back to the bunkhouse. I asked him what in hell he was a-tryin' to do, and he said that all along he had suspected Sid of stretchin' the truth. Can you ee-magine that? Takin' a chance alone? Man, I wouldn't fork that Bucket o' Blood with a dozen men to ride herd for me—and he sneaked out to do it all alone, jist to prove that there was *one* man in the State that could ride him."

"That's takin' fool chances," said Steve.

"Not when you can ride like that. But they won't be here long. 'Cause why? 'Cause Hashknife is always askin' me, 'What's on the other side of that hill over

there? What's over that hill? There's that ridge of blue hills north of here, Thursday—what's beyond them?'

"Sleepy asks questions, too. Derndest fellers I ever seen, Steve. You never know whether they're serious or not. And there's that Bill McGill! What're we goin' to do with him? He's all healed up, but he jist sets out there on the porch with Mary."

Steve smiled and shook his head.

"I dunno, Thursday; don't even know why he's here in Willow Valley. He's up there now, gassin' with Mary and Aunt Ida."

"Aunt Ida's wastin' her breath on that maverick—he don't drink."

"That's nothin' against him."

"Against him—no! But it ain't natcheral. And if he don't quit callin' me Mister Thursday I'm goin' to run him down with a neck yoke. He asked me if I was named after one of the days of the week. I told him I was one of a set of twins in a big family. I was born a minute of twelve, and they called me Thursday the Twelfth. My brother was born a minute after twelve, and they called him Friday the Thirteenth.

"He asked me if Friday had bad luck, and I said he did—he lost his voice answerin' damn' fool questions. Did it stop him? Huh! He asked me why we didn't run numbers on the cows instead of brands. Said it would be much easier to keep track of them noo-meeri'kly. Know what he meant?"

Steve laughed.

"Don't pay any attention to him. He's harmless."

"Harmless, but irritatin'." Thursday went away shaking his head.

Bill McGill had suffered exceedingly, was blind for two days, but came out of it all right. The sun had poisoned him, but now his features were back to normal, his face peeling off like an onion, as Sleepy expressed it, and he was able to wear his boots again.

Aunt Ida had come visiting Mary, but with her ever present inclination to plant seeds of temperance, she was glad for having Bill where she might sound her warning.

"Really," protested Bill, "never having indulged, I do not know anything about the stuff. I am not what you might term a fertile field, Aunt Ida. I may get drunk, or I may not get drunk. You say that the cowboys drink too much, that they are ruining their health. Well—" Bill hooked his clasped hands around one knee and leaned back in his chair—"I would like to have seen them before they began drinking. Of all the healthy animals I have ever seen, they are the finest."

"And yet," she said severely, "you say you are not a fertile field."

"No." Bill laughed. "Perhaps I do not understand your point of view. Why, you even claim that a thirst for liquor is hereditary."

"Of course it is. Did your father drink?"

Bill's smile vanished quickly. He unclasped his fingers and rubbed his forehead thoughtfully.

"That is a question I can't answer—because I never knew my father."

"He died before you were born?"

"Who knows?" He turned and looked at Mary. "Will you believe me when I say I do not know who my mother and father were? I have the name of McGill, but it isn't mine. As far as I can learn, I was never legally adopted by Dr. McGill, whose name I bear. That is why I am over here—to find out what I can about myself."

"Well, goodness gracious!" exclaimed Aunt Ida. "What a calamity!"

"Are you joking?" asked Mary.

"Joking? I wish I were."

"But how—why look for information in the Valley, Bill?"

"Oh, I suppose it is a wild goose chase. I am more convinced of it all the time. Aunt Ida, you have lived here a long time, haven't you?"

"Almost thirty years."

"Did you ever hear of the Willow Valley Copper Company?"

"Willow Valley Copper Company? No, I don't believe I have. It has been many

years since the old mining boom. Hoddy might remember. He was in the thick of it. Oh, yes, he was. And all he ever got out of it was a broken leg. Rode his horse into a prospect hole."

"Drunk?" asked Bill innocently.

"Not admittedly, Mr. McGill."

Aunt Ida arose, picked up her crochet work and went into the house.

"Did I hurt her feelings?" asked Bill. "I wouldn't do it intentionally, you know."

Mary sighed deeply as she shook her head.

"I don't think so. She has quarreled with Uncle Hoddy for thirty years over his thirst, but she resents any one else hinting that he drinks. They are very fond of each other. Uncle Hoddy says he's cured her of nagging and preaching and that the cure has quenched his thirst."

"A double cure." Bill smiled. Then, seriously, "Did any one ever tell you that you are pretty, Mary Pelliser?"

Mary flushed quickly, but replied—

"The men of Willow Valley are not nearsighted, you know."

"You mean—they haven't?"

"Don't be foolish."

"Is it foolish to tell a girl she is pretty? You *are* pretty."

"The sunburn has affected your eyes," said Mary, getting to her feet.

"Don't go in."

MARY stopped in the doorway.

"You might ask Dad about that copper mine. He has been around here a long time, and he might know something about it."

"Thanks, I will— May I call you Mary?"

"That's my name."

"I'm not sure about mine, you know."

"Oh, I didn't mean that."

"It's all right—I don't mind."

Steve Pelliser had walked up to the porch without either of them seeing him.

"Don't quarrel." He laughed and they turned quickly.

Mary made a face at him and went into the house, while Bill walked to the edge of the steps.

"Mr. Pelliser," he said gravely, "I want to ask you a question."

"And I can answer it right now," said Steve seriously, "and the answer is no!"

"Oh!" said Bill blankly. "I'm sorry I—you talked with Aunt Ida?"

"What the hell has she got to do with it?"

"She said she didn't remember."

Steve stared at him.

"She didn't remember what?"

"The Willow Valley Copper Company."

"Yea-a-ah? Say, what are you talkin' about?"

"Why, I wanted to ask you if you ever remembered a mining company by that name."

"Good gosh! I thought you wanted to marry my daughter!"

"No, I—well, you see, I—" floundered Bill.

"Uh-huh."

Steve pushed back his sombrero, his eyes thoughtful.

"Willow Valley Copper, eh? What about it?"

They sat down together, while Bill explained why he was there and what he wanted to find out. Steve humped on the steps, resting his chin on his hands, while Bill explained about the letters and of his trials and tribulations before he finally reached the SP ranch.

"There were so many of them companies," said Steve. "That was a long, long time ago, young man, and lots of them corporations didn't last long. In fact, none of 'em ever lasted more than a year. There wasn't any copper to amount to anythin'; and they died a natural death."

"I suppose I am twenty years too late."

"Just about. But what's the difference? You're a young man, and you're educated. This is the wrong country for you, anyway."

"Wrong?"

"Well, your education wouldn't do you much good here, unless you go into

a bank, or somethin' like that. You belong in a city."

"I suppose that's true, but I haven't any desire to return."

Steve shrugged his shoulders indifferently and got to his feet.

"You're your own boss, young man, but I think you're wastin' time in tryin' to run down shadows of twenty years ago."

"Shadows are what they are, I suppose."

"That's all, Bill. I can't help you. I doubt if there's anybody in the Valley who can help you. It has been so long since the old mining days, and there's none of the old minin' men left. No, I think they're shadows."

"Perhaps. Have you any objections to me staying here awhile? I shall expect to pay my board and room rent, of course."

"Well, I dunno. I'm not runnin' a hotel, you know. Why don'tcha go down to town and live at the hotel?"

"I'd rather not, if you can put up with me."

Steve shook his head.

"I can't do it, Bill. I couldn't take money for your board and room."

"Give me a job."

"A job? What doin'?"

"What have you that I *could* do?"

"Not a thing in the world. You can't ride."

"Might learn."

"I'm not runnin' a school for riders, and you'd be a long time learnin'. Better go back to a city."

"No, I don't want to go back. I wonder if I might get a position in the bank at Willow Wells?"

Steve's eyes narrowed and he gnawed the corner of his lip thoughtfully. A ghost of a smile flitted across his face, as he said—

"I'll speak to Mr. Hart about it, Bill."

"Thank you, Mr. Pelliser."

Steve nodded and walked down to the corral, where he leaned idly against the fence.

"It's a funny old world," he told himself. "Bill McGill. Two old fools of fate. Mebbe I'm wrong, but McGill was the name, I'm sure. And I wonder what Ed will say? Willow Valley Copper Company, your ghost is still walkin' the hills. And unless I'm mistaken the danged young fool is stuck on Mary. The best thing for all concerned is to git him safely out of this country, before he becomes a nuisance."

CHAPTER X

MURDER

NICK LEE, the man who had impersonated the sheriff at High Grade, was an old friend of Scotty McGowan; and Lee was around the Valley several days before he happened to see Hashknife Hartley. It was quite a shock to his nerves when he found that Hashknife and Sleepy were working at the Pelliser ranch. Lee had never told Scotty what happened in High Grade, but after seeing Hashknife he decided to tell him all about it.

He told him how Ed Reese and Jack Erb, the two cowboys, had conceived the idea of taking the money away from the tenderfoot and of the disastrous results when these two traveling cowboys had taken a hand in the matter. He described how they had taken him out of town, made him get off and break all existing records in getting out of sight.

"You should have seen Jack and Eddie when I got back. This tall waddy got them into a fight and they was a mess. They got drunk that evenin', and I pulled out. I kinda had a hunch that I might git even with these two jiggers, so I went to Cinnabar. You know old Matt Daley, who runs the hotel there, don'tcha?

"Well, them two punchers and the tenderfoot stayed there. Old Matt's as crooked as a snake in a cactus patch, and I find out that he's pulled the stolen horse game on 'em, 'cause he's got some broncs he wants to git rid of. Figures he can sell 'em three at a tall price. I keeps out of sight, and old Matt sure sold 'em.

Got a hundred and fifty apiece for a twenty dollar animal. Matt tells me that they've pulled out, but I'm not so sure.

"Anyway I waited until almost dark, and then I headed for here over that old road from Cinnabar."

"Well, they ain't got nothin' on you, except that you played a game," said Scotty.

"Yeah, that's true. But here's another queer one, Scotty. I ain't more than a mile or so from Cinnabar, when I runs into that tenderfoot ag'in. He don't rec'nize me in the dark, and I figure he thinks I'm one of them other two. Anyway, I stick him up for what he's got and took his bronc."

"Oh! Did he know who you was, Lee?"

"No. But he's out at the Pelliser ranch, and I'm here. It wouldn't sprain anybody's brain to figure who got his money and bronc."

"Aw, forget it. They can't prove nothin'. But who in hell are these two strange punchers?"

"Search me. But I'll tell you one thing, they're forked and salty. Don't forget that, Scotty. They shore tell you where to head in."

"Well, they ain't after you, so forget it."

In the meantime Bill McGilll was loath to leave the Pelliser ranch. He had no place to go.

"Kinda helpless," said Hashknife to Steve Pelliser, a day or so after Bill had unburdened himself to Steve.

"Yeah — helpless," agreed Steve. "Wanted me to board and room him, but I can't do that. He ain't no earthly good around here. Don't even know which side of a horse to get on to. I told Mary I was goin' to ship him away from here."

Steve paused reflectively.

"I caught him recitin' poetry to her yesterday."

"Did he recite it well?" Hashknife smiled.

"That part of it didn't interest me a damn' bit."

"She's a pretty girl, and he's a good lookin' youngster."

"And that," said Steve slowly, "is jist why Bill McGill has got to git away from here."

Hashknife grinned and went away. He did not appreciate Steve's viewpoint in the matter at all. Hashknife had heard all about the killing of Jim McGowan and had even been shown the hole in the corral post where McGowan's bullet had bored into the wood. Thursday Adams' idea was that the two men had fought over Mary Pelliser.

"O' course," warned Thursday, "that's jist my idea—but it's reasonable. Pink's story about all that shootin' in the dark is bunk. McGowan wanted to marry this girl, I tell you, and when he seen Pink Lowry beatin' his time, he runs into Pink down there by the stable and they had words. It was jist a case of McGowan missin', Pink hittin'. Oh, it was self-defense, but why make a mystery over it?"

"Lowry seems like a nice feller."

"Nicest you ever seen. He was past here yesterday and he talked to me. Never went near the house, 'cause Bill was there. He asked me about Bill, and I told him he better shine up his shirt or dance at somebody else's weddin'. He acted like I'd stepped on his corns. He don't come out to see her. Can't expect her to go and see him, can he?"

"Did she like Lowry?" asked Hashknife, rather amused at Thursday.

"I reckon she did—better than she did McGowan."

Hashknife and Sleepy were going to town that evening, and Bill asked to go along. He had never been at Willow Wells and he needed some new clothes. His war-bag was somewhere along the old road out of Cinnabar. He had been wearing a pair of Steve's socks, which he wished to replace.

Thursday Adams went along with them, and they left Thursday, with Bill, at the store. Hashknife and Sleepy met Dud Evans, and the three of them went to the War Paint, where they found Scotty McGowan and Buck Haskell. Scotty had been drinking and was in a belligerent

mood, while Buck greatly desired to sing.

Scotty gazed moodily upon Hashknife and Sleepy, decided that they might resent any familiarity on his part, and let them alone. The three men were at the bar when Nick Lee came in with Sam Hall, an undersized cowboy from the McGowan ranch. They stopped to watch a poker game, and when Nick Lee glanced around, he saw Hashknife looking at him. Lee tried to appear nonchalant, but he swallowed heavily and looked away.

"Outside your own county, ain'tcha, Sheriff?" said Hashknife.

Lee affected extreme deafness.

"Feller talkin' to you, Lee," said Sam Hall.

"Oh!" grunted Lee.

"Called you sheriff."

"Huh?"

Lee looked at Hashknife, who was grinning. Lee grinned, too, because it looked like an easy way out.

"Didja resign?" asked Hashknife.

"He asked you if you resigned," said Sam, as if acting as interpreter.

Hashknife turned to Dud Evans.

"That's a man you ought to know. He's the sheriff at High Grade. You sheriffs ought to know each other."

"That's right," grinned Evans. "What didja say the name was?"

Lee was cornered, looking for a way out. Scotty was close enough to hear what was being said. He seemed to enjoy it.

"Tell'm to go to hell, Lee," he advised.

"You better keep your horns out of this, Scotty," advised Dud.

SLEEPY had moved slowly around until he was within reach of Scotty, who realized he was getting in bad. He shrugged his shoulders and turned around. For several moments he seemed undecided what to do, but finally headed for the front door; and with him went Nick Lee, thankful to get away. Sam Hall laughed loudly, as if with complete enjoyment.

"I'll buy a drink," he offered. "Them two jiggers are supposed to be plumb saline—*mucho salinas*, as they say. I never did see that Lee feller until he came here; but Scotty says he is *mucho malo hombre*. What'll you have, gents?"

"Who is he, anyway?" asked the sheriff as they accepted the drink.

"Jist a waddy from over in the Cinnabar country; old friend of Scotty McGowan. Scotty sent for him, I reckon. Here's how."

Hall paid for the drink and walked out. Hashknife and Sleepy went over to the pool table, racked up the balls and began playing, while Dud perched on the back of a chair and offered advice on the shots. They were arguing when Thursday Adams came in, hat in hand, a wide grin on his face.

"You shore missed a sight!" he blurted. "Golly, it was good! Me and Bill are over there in the store where you left us, when in comes Scotty McGowan and another jigger—a stranger to me. You know, they don't light up that store very good, and this stranger almost ran into Bill. I don't know yet what it's all about.

"Them two met right there beside the counter, and they looks at each other for long enough to count ten. This here stranger says, 'Well, if here ain't little Red Ridin' Hood.' Jist like that. And Bill draws back his right fist, bats this stranger plumb in the nose and knocks him half the length of the store. And then Bill walks right over him and goes out through the doorway.

"Well, none of us gets much explanation. Scotty swears he don't know what it's all about, and this stranger is losin' so much red ink that he ain't explainin' anythin'. I can't find Bill—and there you are."

Hashknife placed his cue on the table top and sat down in a chair to laugh.

"Bill," said Sleepy chokingly, "is gettin' civilized."

They went out and tried to find the boy. His horse was still tied to the hitch-rack, but Bill was not in evidence.

"Do you reckon he got scared and pulled out on foot?" asked Evans.

"I can't believe that," replied Hashknife. "I don't reckon Bill ever hit a man before, and it might react kinda funny on him. He might think that this feller would kill him on sight, and he'll keep out of his way. We'll have to wait until he gits over his scare."

"Is he packin' a gun?"

"Not in sight."

"Well, I dunno," said Thursday. "He asked me if I knowed where Mr. Hart, the banker, lived, and I told him. He didn't say why he wanted to know."

"Maybe he went out to Hart's house," suggested the sheriff.

"Well, we'll wait and see if he shows up," said Hashknife.

They went to the store, but Scotty and Nick Lee had left there. The storekeeper said that the stranger was angry about the blow.

"I think his nose was busted. Anyway, it looked as though it was. I've got the bundle of stuff the tenderfoot bought. I reckon he forgot it."

"I'll give it to him," said Sleepy, taking the package.

They were standing on the sidewalk in front of the store, when a man came running across the street. It was the blacksmith.

"Is the sheriff there?" he panted. "Oh, hello, Evans! Say, you better get up to the Hart house right quick—I'll get the doctor."

And without any further information, he ran down the street.

"That's funny," said Evans. "Hart home, eh? C'mon."

Edward Hart lived in a neat frame house, located about three city blocks from the main street. The nearest house was the one occupied by Jeff Miller, the blacksmith, about a hundred feet away.

Not knowing what had happened, the four men ran all the way to the Hart home, where they found Mrs. Miller at the gate. The front door was open, the light shining out on the little vine covered porch.

"Somebody shot Mr. Hart," she said hoarsely. "Mrs. Hart's in there with him. Did Jeff go for the doctor?"

"Yes," said Evans shortly. "Who shot Hart?"

"Nobody knows. Mrs. Hart was over at our house, when we heard a shot. Jimmy, that's my oldest boy, says there were two shots, but I only heard one. We came out on our porch, but there wasn't anythin' wrong as far as we could see. But Mrs. Hart said she'd go on home. Pretty soon I heard her scream for help, and me and Jeff came runnin' over."

The sheriff and Hashknife went into the house, while Sleepy and Thursday sat down on the porch. After a few moments Hashknife came back to the door.

"Hit pretty hard," he said.

The doctor was coming, and they could hear the excited voice of the blacksmith as he tried to explain. There was a soft groan from the shrubbery beside the porch, and Sleepy got quickly to his feet. The bushes quivered considerably. Hashknife stepped to the edge of the porch as a man raised up to a sitting position.

It was Bill McGill, a trickle of blood over his left temple, a vacant expression in his eyes. Then he got to his feet. Clenched in his right hand was a heavy Colt.

"For God's sake, Bill!" cried Sleepy.

Evans stepped out on the porch, staring at Bill, as Hashknife jumped down and removed the gun from the boy's hand. The doctor came hurrying down the little sandy walk, brushed past them without a word and entered the house. Hashknife seated Bill on the steps and wiped the blood off his face.

"What happened, Bill?" he asked.

"What was he doin' with that gun?" queried the sheriff, taking it from Hashknife and examining it. "One chamber empty," he said. "I guess this is the gun. Smells as though it had just been fired."

Bill was beginning to recover. He wiped his face, stared at the handkerchief and put it into his pocket.

"What happened?" asked Hashknife.

Bill looked at him dazedly.

"I hurt my head, I guess."

The sheriff went back into the house, where the doctor was working over his patient. Hashknife went in and looked around. They had the wounded man on a couch. Mrs. Hart was sitting in a rocking chair, her face in her hands. The sheriff rested one hand against the wall, watching the doctor.

"Badly hurt, Doc?" he asked.

"Bad enough. Who shot him?"

"We ain't got that far—yet."

Hashknife examined the room. One window, a front one, was wide open, the shade up, a pair of lace curtains playing back and forth in the breeze. The sheriff tried to question Mrs. Hart, but she knew nothing. She had found her husband on the floor. There had been no one with him when she went over to see Mrs. Miller.

Hashknife and the sheriff went back to the porch. Bill was still hazy about what had happened. He did not seem able to tell why he should be lying out there in the bushes with a six-shooter in his hand.

"I hate to do it," said the sheriff, "but I'm afraid I've got to lock this boy up—until he knows somethin'.

Hashknife nodded slowly.

"It looks thataway, Evans. Queer deal all the way around. He's been hit on the head."

"Been hit twice," corrected Sleepy. "I examined him."

"Remember bein' hit, Bill?" asked Thursday.

"I know I have a fearful headache."

Evans drew Hashknife aside.

"I think I better lock him up. Folks around here are mighty fond of Hart, and you never can tell, you know."

"That's true. I'll go with you."

Bill was a little wobbly on his legs and a trifle vague about things, but went willingly. They locked him in a cell after bandaging his head, which had swollen badly on one side, and helped him to bed. The doctor had put Hart to bed by the time they got back to the house.

"We've got to wait and see what happens," he told them. "It's a bad hurt, boys."

"Got a fightin' chance?" asked the sheriff.

"Just about. The bullet is still in there. Struck a rib, I think, I'll try and take it out tomorrow, when I can get enough light to work by. I'll be here all night."

The three cowboys rode back to the Pelliser ranch. It was past midnight, so they did not awaken any one to tell them.

"I suppose you're satisfied, Hashknife," said Sleepy, as he sat on the edge of his bunk, drawing off his boots.

"Satisfied over what?"

"Somethin' to work on."

"Oh!"

"I was just wonderin' if that feller that Bill hit had anythin' to do with it."

"Hart didn't hit him."

"I know that. But mebbe somebody shot at Bill and hit Hart."

"Doin' a little thinkin' yourself, ain'tcha?" Hashknife said, smiling.

"A little. I kinda like Bill McGill."

"Yea-a-a-ah. Bill's all right—the danged fool."

"But who hit him on the head twice?"

"Keep thinkin'—you might get it. That's how I got my start."

THE SHOOTING of Edward Hart rather upset Willow Valley. He was universally liked and respected; so much so, in fact, that men came a long way to get the details and find out what was being done to punish the man who shot him. There was little change in his condition. The doctor forbade any one's going in to see him; accordingly the cattlemen congregated, drank too much liquor and wanted to know more about the tenderfoot who was in jail.

Bill McGill was willing to talk and did talk, but the prosecutor did not believe him. It was not a consistent story. Bill told it to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"After I had trouble with that man in the store, I decided to go and see Mr.

Hart at his home. Thursday told me where he lived. I found Mr. Hart at home, and he asked me to come in. I told him what I wanted, and he said there was no opening at the present time.

"We sat down to talk a few minutes, and he said he wanted a drink. I noticed this big revolver on the table, near where I was sitting. Mr. Hart left the door open when he went to the kitchen, and I was looking at him as he came back in. I remember that he turned his head and looked back toward the kitchen, and just at that moment I heard the report of a gun.

"It was like a clap of thunder and frightened me for—well, anyway, it was considerable of a shock. I saw Mr. Hart falling forward. I don't remember taking that gun, but I suppose I did. I remember running to the front door, throwing it open, and my toe caught on a rug. I was falling when something struck me on the head. I dimly remember hearing another shot, and then—then I don't know what happened."

Bill told his story haltingly, as if afraid of a misstatement, and he kept his eyes on the floor as he talked.

"I guess I was still dazed when I was put in jail."

"Remember firin' a shot from that gun?" asked Hashknife.

"I do not," Bill answered crisply. "In fact, I have never shot a gun in my life."

"I believe you," said Hashknife, "but the rest of 'em don't, Bill."

"My heavens! They don't think I killed Mr. Hart?"

"I'm afraid they do. You see, they don't know you like we do."

"Does Mr. Pelliser and—Mary?"

"They didn't say. It was quite a shock to Pelliser, you know. Bill, I'm shore afraid they'll keep you here quite awhile."

"But I am innocent of any wrong, Hashknife."

"I know. There's no earthly reason for you to kill him. You didn't even meet him until last night. But a jury of these Willow Valley cowmen would hang you higher than a kite, evidence or no evidence. Hart was mighty well liked around here. The thing to do is not to prove your innocence, but to prove somebody else guilty."

"Could that be done?"

"That question shows lack of practise in thinkin', Bill."

They left Bill and went over to the War Paint, which was crowded. Nick Lee was there, back to the bar, while the rest of the Diamond R outfit were scattered around the room. The man who called himself Smith, whose injuries were not entirely healed, was at the bar with Lee.

Lee was talking rather loudly, with but few listeners.

"Well, they caught him in the act, didn't they? What the hell good is the law if that's all they do? Found him out there with a gun in his hand, and one shot fired. They'll use up a lot of taxpayer's money and then turn him loose. The law is pretty damn' loose, I'd say."

"And lenient," said Hashknife.

Lee twisted his head quickly, his jaw sagging a little.

"Otherwise some folks I know would be breakin' rocks," added Hashknife.

Some of the men laughed. Even if they did agree with Lee, they did not approve of his soap box actions.

Lee shrugged his shoulders and tried to appear indifferent.

"Are you through talkin'?" asked Hashknife.

Lee looked at him defiantly for a few moments, but shifted his gaze. He did not like the level stare of those gray eyes.

"Well, I've said what I wanted to," he growled.

"I haven't. You stand there and kick about the law being slow to hang a man whose sole guilt is in having been on the spot of crime. The tenderfoot kid never killed anybody. He hasn't a crooked thought in his danged head. And you kick because they don't hang him quick. Your name's Lee, ain't it? That's what them two horsethieves called you. Want

me to tell this crowd what kind of a hairpin you are, Lee? No? Then keep your mouth shut about the laxity of the law."

Lee turned slowly around and motioned for the bartender to serve them. The scar faced man studied Hashknife intently, but said nothing.

"How are you comin' along, Smith?" asked Hashknife pleasantly.

"All right, thank you."

"That's fine."

As they passed toward the rear of the room, Scotty McGowan accosted Hashknife.

"I'd like to talk with you a minute. My name's McGowan, Hartley."

"I knew you by sight, McGowan."

"Good. You know that Hart was a friend of mine, and I kinda want to git your opinion of this tenderfoot they've got jailed for the shootin'. What you jist told Lee kinda struck me as good sense. You don't believe the kid shot him, eh?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"I don't. Why would he?"

"That's what I'm drivin' at. Who is this kid they call McGill? Where did he come from and what's he doin' here?"

Hashknife explained as much as he knew of Bill's personal affairs, and Scotty listened attentively.

"Well, that shore don't show any reason why he should shoot Hart," admitted Scotty, after Hashknife had finished.

"Did Hart ever have any trouble with anybody around here?" asked Hashknife. "Ever put anybody out of business through the bank?"

"I don't believe he did. Never heard of anythin' like that. I'm glad you told me what you did, Hartley. Lotsa folks don't *sabe* anythin' about this kid, and they might try takin' him out of jail some night."

"That would shore be a pity."

"Yeah, it would. What kind of a chance do you think Hart stands?"

"The doctor won't even make a statement."

"Uh-huh. If he recovers, mebbe he can tell who shot him."

"I hope so, but I doubt it. My opinion is that Hart was shot while his head was turned, and that he never seen the man who shot him. The kid told me that Hart was lookin' toward the kitchen when the shot was fired."

"There was only the kid and Hart in the room."

"But the window was open."

"Oh, yeah. Well, it shore is a mix-up. Thanks for tellin' me about it."

"You're welcome, McGowan."

MARY and her father came to town early that morning, and Pink let them in to talk with Bill. Pink was sour about Mary's coming down to the jail but secretly glad that Bill McGill was away from the Pelliser ranch. After the interview Mary met Pink in the office.

"You haven't been out to see us for a long time," she said.

"I was past there," admitted Pink, "but you had company."

"Why, Pink, we haven't had any company for ages."

"Oh!"

"Why, you didn't stay away on account of Bill McGill, did you?"

"Well—" Pink rubbed an ear violently—"well, he—he's company."

"No such a thing—he was a patient."

"Oh, that's how it was."

"He wouldn't have bitten you."

"No-o-o," admitted Pink, "but I don't like to horn in. Say, I've got a dinger of a new mouth harp. Sent away for it."

"Bring it out with you."

"Yeah, I shore will."

"You haven't been out since the party, you know."

"I know." Pink grinned slowly, bashfully. "My clothes wasn't—"

"Forget the clothes."

"Well, I was to blame for bustin' up that party, Mary. I've tried to puzzle out why Jim McGowan ever took that shot at me. I didn't like Jim, but I'm shore sorry it had to be thataway. It wasn't like him. I always thought he was too practical to shoot at a man in the dark."

"Didn't he say anything before he shot?"

"I swear I don't know. The wind was blowin' toward him from me, and the music was kinda loud, you know. I did hear the stable door slam just a few moments before the shot was fired. I tell you the truth, I was so sore about what McGowan said to me in the house, that I wouldn't have heard anythin'."

Mary nodded slowly.

"I heard what was said."

"It wasn't bad enough to start a battle over."

"I know. Oh, I'm sorry about what I did, Pink. McGowan asked me to dance with him, and I told him I was engaged when I wasn't. That was why I grabbed you and made you dance that first quadrille with me. McGowan knew I lied."

"Well," Pink said slowly, "it's all over now. What do you think of them new cowboys you've got out there?"

"I don't know so much about them, but Dad likes them fine. Hashknife says such serious things, and Sleepy laughs at everything and everybody."

"What do you think of Bill McGill's story?"

"I think he is telling the truth, don't you?"

"Well—" Pink grinned— "I believe it more now than I did awhile ago."

"What caused the change in your beliefs?"

"Findin' out that he wasn't company at your house."

Mary laughed and went on up the street, while Pink did a shuffle on the office floor. He wanted to go in and hug Bill McGill, but was afraid Bill might not take kindly to such a procedure.

The following day Edward Hart regained consciousness. The sheriff happened to be there at the time. Hart's memory seemed all right, and he wanted to talk; so the doctor merely warned him against it.

"Did you see the man who shot you?" asked the sheriff, eager to find out what Hart knew.

"The stranger," he whispered, "was the only person in the room. I can't swear he shot me. My gun was there on the table."

"You don't know where the shot came from?"

Hart shook his head weakly.

"It was pretty close."

The doctor forbade any further questioning, and the sheriff went back to the office to talk with Bill about what the banker had said.

"But I didn't," protested Bill. "I've told the truth, Sheriff."

Bill McGill's reasons for being in Willow Valley had been broadcast by word of mouth, but no one seemed interested; people wanted to know his reasons for shooting Edward Hart.

And that night the banker died. Pink rode out early the next morning, bearing the news to Steve Pelliser and the rest of the SP outfit.

"He was conscious for awhile yesterday evenin'," explained Pink. "He seemed to think that Bill shot him. He said he wasn't sure."

It was quite a blow to Steve, although he said nothing. Mary went to town with her father, but the rest of the boys went ahead with their work. That afternoon after they returned Steve told Hashknife that the doctor had taken the bullet from Hart's body, that it was a .45.

"Same as the gun Bill had," said Hashknife.

"The kid is up against a hard deal," declared Steve. "They'll cinch him as sure as fate. Ed didn't have an enemy in this Valley. I hate to say it, but I'm afraid Bill did the job. No, I'm not bitter, Hartley. Ed was my best friend, but I'm not bitter against the kid. Why he did it, God knows. I'd believe him innocent as quick as a flash, if there was a chance in the world."

"They'll hold him for murder, you think?"

"Sure as fate. Judge Lindsay won't be here until tomorrow, so they'll have to hold his preliminary when he comes."

"I still don't believe the kid killed him, Steve."

"I wish you were right."

"Do you?" Hashknife looked at him quizzically.

"I certainly do."

"All right, pardner. You fire me off this job I've got, and I'll see if I can't scare up a murderer."

Steve stared at him for several moments.

"I don't *sabe* your idea."

"Well, I can't do much if I keep workin' every day. You fire me."

"You mean to work on this case? Are you a detective, Hartley?"

"No-o-o, I'm not—not a reg'lar one."

"What do you know?"

"Nothin'—yet."

"Well, I won't fire you. But if you think there's a chance to save that kid, I'll pay your salary and let you do as you please."

"Why are you so anxious to save the kid?"

Steve hunched back against the corral fence, his eyes somber as he looked off across the hills.

"I'd hate to see an innocent man hanged," he said slowly. "The kid is nothin' to me. Go ahead and work on the case, Hartley. I'll pay the bill."

"You're a square shooter."

"Mm-m-m. I've been hit hard today and I feel kinda limp. You see, me and Hart have been friends for years, and I'll miss him a lot."

"You don't remember anythin' about that Willow Valley Copper Company, do you, Steve?"

"What the kid was searchin' for? No. I never mixed up with the minin' game to any extent."

"Did Hart?"

Hashknife wondered why Steve gave him such a searching look.

"I guess not." Steve turned away. "He never said anythin' about it."

"Was Hart in the cattle business?"

"Punched cows for awhile years ago. He married money. Oh, not a barrel of it, but enough to set up the bank at Willow Wells. Hart was educated in the East, but he came West, dropped his education and learned to ride the range. A lot of men have done that. The bank has made money."

"You say Hart had no enemies?"

"Not one—that I know anything about."

"Uh-huh. Do you know if he held any mortgages against ranches in the Valley? Any notes or anythin' that would cause a man to wish for his death?"

Steve's eyes narrowed thoughtfully, but he finally shook his head.

"I don't know of any."

"Somebody had a reason to kill him, you know. Only crazy men kill without reason, and you ain't got no crazy men around here. At least—" Hashknife smiled— "not crazy enough to do a thing like that."

"No, I guess not."

"Well, it looks like a blank wall," admitted Hashknife, "but I'll see if there ain't a crack in the wall somewhere. Don't tell anybody I'm doin' anythin', 'cause I don't want a bullet in the back."

"You seem convinced that the kid didn't do it."

"I'm hopin' he didn't; there's nothin' sure."

"I wish you luck."

HASHKNIFE did not tell Sleepy of his new arrangement with Pelliser. He knew Sleepy would go ahead with his own job, asking no questions. Sleepy had perfect faith in Hashknife. After supper that evening Hashknife rode to Willow Wells. He found Evans and Lowry at the sheriff's office, and the three of them went in for a short talk with Bill, whose preliminary hearing was set for two o'clock the following afternoon.

Bill was a bit downhearted, but felt that the judge would release him as soon as he heard his story. The boys cheered him up as much as they could. They left Pink at the office and went over to the War Paint. The place was almost deserted, but they managed to get Miller, the blacksmith, and Frank Davis, bookkeeper in the bank, to play sluff with

them, while the bartender sat on the back of a chair, watching the game.

They played for a couple of hours, then Davis went home. He was in charge of the bank until the directors decided on what to do. Hashknife was tired of cards, and when the bartender took Davis' place and suggested a small poker game, Hashknife drew out, lighted a cigaret and walked out of the place.

He crossed the street and went into a store, where he made a few purchases. Several men were there, and the conversation was all about the murder of Edward Hart. Hashknife leaned on a counter and listened to the different opinions regarding Bill McGill.

No one seemed to have any idea why Bill should shoot Hart, but they were of the general opinion that Willow Wells would have a murder trial.

"Judge Lindsay will shore soak him plenty," decided one of the men. "He's death on murderers."

Hashknife smiled to himself. Death on murderers!

"And I'd like to see you pick a jury in this county that wouldn't hang that feller."

"You couldn't do it."

Hashknife wandered back to the door. He could understand them. They were of the types of human beings who believe any man in jail is guilty; their reasoning is that he would not be in jail if he was not guilty.

Hashknife went outside and stood on the edge of the sidewalk. It was rather dark, and the street was lighted only by two or three windows. There seemed to be a lot of horses around the sheriff's office; men and horses. Hashknife's heart gave a quick jump. He knew what it meant.

Swiftly he ran across the street to the War Paint, where he yelled at the sheriff—

"They're takin' Bill out of the jail, Evans!"

The sheriff kicked back his chair and came running, followed by all the others. The men were mounting now—were riding down the street in a compact mass. The sheriff ran from the saloon to the office, where the door stood wide open. The rear half of the office was the jail.

Pink Lowry was stretched on a cot, blood dripping from a cut on the side of his head. The sheriff ran quickly down to Bill's cell, where the door sagged open. The cell was empty.

The sheriff ran back and found Hashknife examining Pink's head.

"They swatted him over the head," said Hashknife. "Get me some water."

"They've got Bill!" exclaimed the sheriff. "My God, what next? They'll lynch him before we can stop 'em, Hashknife."

Hashknife got up quickly and turned to the bartender.

"Get some water and bathe that cut. Miller, you run for the doctor and bring him here. Evans, have you got a couple rifles? Oh, yeah."

Hashknife strode across the room and took down a Winchester, around which was wound a belt full of ammunition.

"Take a rifle and get your horse. Mine's at the hitch-rack. We may not be able to do anythin' for the kid, but we'll try. Where's the nearest big tree south of here?"

But the sheriff did not wait to figure out details; he was on the way to his stable. Hashknife ran up the street and mounted his horse. Evans did not take time to bridle his mount, but rode with a hackamore. He met Hashknife in front of the office, and they raced their horses down the street and over the road which led southward to Newton.

There were trees along the road, but no sign of the lynchers; so the two men pounded along to the Diamond R ranch, which was in darkness. They circled the ranch-house close enough to see that no horses were concealed behind the buildings and then came back to the road. Both horses were heaving from the long run.

"They've got away," said the sheriff dismally. "Started south and turned north, I'll betcha. Threw us off the trail. Well, it's too late to help him now."

Hashknife was obliged to agree. The

lynchers would not delay matters.

"I only hope Pink was able to identify some of 'em," said the sheriff, as they headed back toward town.

"What satisfaction in that?" asked Hashknife wearily. "Kick up an awful mess here in the Valley. There were at least a dozen men in that gang."

"Oh, I suppose. Men are awful fools sometimes, Hashknife."

"Men," said Hashknife slowly, "are awful fools most of the time—especially when they're in a bunch. The sheep instinct, I reckon."

They came back to the office and dismounted. The blacksmith and the doctor were with Pink, who was sitting on the bunk, his head bandaged, smoking a cigaret. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked miserable.

"Didja find 'em?" asked Miller anxiously.

"They slipped us," replied the sheriff. "We went as far as the Diamond R, but didn't find a soul. What do you know, Pink?"

"I know I got hit," Pink said sourly. "Didja see any of that gang?"

"I didn't see nothin' but stars. Doc took two stitches in my scalp." Pink grinned painfully over his cigaret. "I was settin' in here readin' when I heard somebody outside. It wasn't exactly a knock—it was more like somebody brushed against the door. I got right up and opened it, stuck my head out—and somebody dropped a match in the barrel of skyrockets."

"Didn't you even see that bunch of horses?"

"Nope."

"Somebody petted him on the head with a rifle barrel," said the blacksmith.

The sheriff returned the two rifles to the wall and slumped into a chair.

"I'll be going back," said the doctor. "Dress that head again tomorrow."

"Thanks, Doc," said Pink, as the doctor walked out.

"They unlocked the cell with your key," said the sheriff.

"Took it out of my pocket."

"It was still in the lock."

"Do you suppose they hung Bill?"

Evans looked at his deputy pityingly.

"I s'pose they did," said Pink sadly. "And you don't need to look at me thataway, Dud. I've been through enough tonight."

"It shore didn't reach your brains."

"If I had any brains to begin with, I wouldn't be a deputy sheriff."

"There's no use quarrelin'," said Hashknife. "It's all over by this time. We'll just have to wait until somebody locates the scene, and then cut Bill off the limb. I reckon I'll go home."

"And I'm goin' to bed," decided Pink. "I've been through somethin'."

"Yeah, and you'll go through more, if you don't stop wailin'," said the sheriff. "Anybody'd think you was hurt."

"Look at my head!"

"I've been lookin' at it for years—wonderin' at the handiwork of Nature. She shore plays jokes on the human race."

"Yea-a-ah? I'll match my brains against yours any old time, Mr. Evans."

"You would, eh? Huh! And if the winner had some calf liver, he could scramble the whole works and not have enough for a hummin' bird's breakfast."

They were still glaring belligerently at each other when Hashknife softly closed the door and went out to his horse. They were not going to fight. Their nerves were overwrought, and this was merely an outlet for their feelings.

HASHKNIFE mounted his horse and rode back to the ranch. He had always detested mob law, and now he was more against it than ever. They had not given the boy a chance, and Hashknife believed him innocent. He hated to bear the news to Mary and her father, hated even to think about it himself. No one would be punished for the deed. The cattlemen were always a clannish crew and the sheriff could do nothing.

He went in at the big gate and started for the stable, but Mary called to him from the front porch and he rode up to her.

"You're up pretty late, ain't you?" he asked, as he dismounted.

"I couldn't sleep," she replied. "Dad went to town to sit up with the body. Mrs. Hart sent word that she'd like to have him. What is new in town?"

Hashknife sat down on the porch, while the gray horse nuzzled at him in the dark.

"Mighty bad news, Mary. The lynch lawyers took Bill out of the jail tonight."

"Lynch lawyers?"

"Men who take the law in their own hands."

"You mean—oh, Hashknife, they didn't!"

"I reckon they did. Knocked Pink Lowry cold. We tried to find 'em, but they faded out with him. Gee, it's a tough way to cash in your last chip."

"But—but—"

Words failed her. She was crying now.

"I feel bad about it myself," Hashknife said slowly. "I liked the danged fool, and I don't believe he shot Hart. But what's the use—now? Even if we knew who *was* guilty, it wouldn't bring Bill back."

"Oh, who would have done such a thing? Isn't there a punishment for a deed like that?"

"Yes'm—it's against the law. Lots o' things against the law, you know."

"It's just the same as murder."

"The law misses badly in some cases, Mary. I've known cases where a man was as guilty as hell, and yet the law let him loose. And then it's time for lynch lawyers—not before the suspect has even been heard. Poor Bill never had a chance. Oh, it's murder all right."

"What will Dad say?"

"He's prob'ly heard about it by this time."

"Are you sure they'd hang him?"

"Sure? Mary, they knocked out Pink Lowry to get him. What else would they want him for?"

"I guess there's no hope."

They sat there together, thinking it over. Far away a cow bawled dismally, a cricket chirped beside the porch. The rim of the moon was just showing over the hills, and a lonesome coyote protested.

Some one was coming through the big gate. It was a man on foot, and he came slowly toward the porch. The light was behind him and his size was exaggerated, his shadow almost reaching the house from the gate.

"Who's this?" murmured Hashknife.

The man came on until he was not over twenty feet away, where he stopped. Hashknife cleared his throat softly.

"Lovely evening, isn't it?" said the man.

"My God!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Bill McGill!"

"Oh, it's Hashknife. I wondered where you were."

Mary did not speak. The shock was almost too much for her nerves. Bill came over to the porch.

"I believe I have another blister," he said. "Hello, Mary. I didn't expect to find you up at this hour."

"They—they didn't hang you?" she whispered.

"I don't understand."

"Listen to me, Bill," said Hashknife severely. "What did those men do to you?"

"*Those* men? Oh, do you mean the man who let me out of the jail?"

"There were at least a dozen of them, Bill."

"Possibly. I saw but one. He unlocked the cell door, pointed toward the back door and said, 'Get to hell out of here.' Rather a difficult order to fulfill, of course, but I went as far as I could. After I got out, I had no idea of what to do; so I walked out here."

"What did this one man look like?"

"I haven't any idea because he wore a covering on his face. I thought it rather queer at the time, but I was pleased to get out, you see."

"Did he carry a light?"

"None at all; but there was light enough shining down the corridor from the sheriff's office for me to see him rather plainly."

Hashknife stood up and leaned against

the porch. He could not understand what it was all about. Why should these men let Bill loose? It was rather a ridiculous thing to do, he thought.

"Did you come around to the main street?" he asked, thinking that Bill might have seen the crowd around the front of the office.

"No, I did not."

"What did you think, when this man let you out?"

"Oh, I was quite pleased with him."

"Mm-m-m. Bill, you're a queer jigger. But what's to be done now? They'll put you back in jail and try you for murder."

"I should hate to go back there again."

"I should think you would."

"Can't we hide him?" asked Mary.

Hashknife had been revolving the thing over in his mind. Could it be possible that some man had released Bill, knowing that the lynchers were coming? It was a bare possibility. And next time Bill would be there when they came.

"Where on earth could we hide him?" said Hashknife.

"Oh, I know!" Mary's voice was eager. "Over there against the hill is an old dugout. It was my playhouse when I was a little girl. There is a lot of brush around the doorway and nobody ever goes there. We could get some blankets for him, and One Hop would—One Hop will do anything I tell him."

"By golly, it's a chance!" exclaimed Hashknife. "But just remember, we'll all go to jail if he's discovered."

"Rather a foolish move on your part, then," said Bill.

"I'm not afraid," said Mary. "I'll get the blankets right now."

She went into the house, and Hashknife turned to Bill.

"Pardner, you've got to play the game with us. If you go back to that jail, your neck will be disjointed inside of a week. If you hide in this dugout, by golly, you stay there durin' the daylight. One peep out of you, and we all go to jail, *sabe?*"

"I understand, Hashknife—and thanks. Mighty good of you both."

"You play the game, Bill McGill."

Mary came out with several blankets and a pillow. She carried a few candles and led the way to the dugout, which was on the slope behind the stable. A jutting rock and some brush concealed the old doorway from the ranch-house. It was about fifteen feet deep by ten feet wide, dirt floor and no furnishings of any kind.

Mary made up a bed for Bill. It looked fairly hard, but Bill was grateful and promised to keep well hidden. Hashknife and Mary raided the kitchen for enough food to keep him one day, and they brought him a bucket of water too.

"I'll let One Hop in on it tomorrow," said Mary. "He'll keep a secret and he'll see that you don't starve."

They shook hands with the boy and went back to the house.

"This has been a big night," Hashknife laughed. "I hate to keep Evans in ignorance and let him ride the hocks off his bronc, lookin' for the corpse of Bill McGill; but it won't hurt him."

"Pink wasn't hurt much, was he?"

"Couple of stitches. Well, you better go to bed, Miss Lawbreaker."

Mary laughed and held out her hand.

"Good night, pardner."

The door closed softly behind her, and Hashknife faded out toward the stable, leading his tall gray horse.

TO BE CONTINUED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Self-Portrait Of An Author

BROTHER SCHINDLER depicts the merry scene when he came home from Armistice Day ceremonies in Chicago to find that he had sold his latest story.

It is right for you to dissemble your love, but I thought you were going to kick me downstairs again. I got back home from Soldiers' Field, where people made much noise—even I could hear it—although I don't know why it is necessary to make noise at a solemn occasion. Brother Finegold, our exalted Elk, made a speech, as did my lodge brother, Louis Emmerson, Governor of the great Commonwealth of Illinois, not to mention the Hon. Chas. Curtis, Vice-President of this cuckoo nation. I didn't get much of what they said, but they made good speeches. Anyway, I got home, and the wife says, "Well, boy, you're going to get a new suit, new shoes, a ream of paper, a stack of envelopes and some new ribbons."

"Oh, yeah?" says I, sarcastic. "When did I rob this bank and how did I get away with it?"

"Well, you got away with something," she says. "Better take another look and see what the other fellows are doing, and then give them something different." Which is my motto, although, as yet, editors can't see it for whistleberries.

It's a good motto; even an editor could use it. Me, I'm like the Dartmouth football squad; it's a good team, but it can't beat Yale.

Anyway, she gave me your note, to which I says, "Thank God for *Adventure!*" So I thank you heartily for another break. I'd like to give you a title, too, but I'll be doggoned if I know what to call it; "Twins Of A Feather" might panic you.

—FRANK J. SCHINDLER, Past Exalted Pipe Knight

The Middle Aged

B. W. COSTLOW, whose address follows his signature, is concerned about the fact that youth is taking all the glory in this country. We give him the floor:

Would like to get in touch with some of the Camp-Fire boys who are gray around the temples, in other words, getting middle aged or old. The writer operates a special outfit for one of the big railroads of this United States. I rambled with this outfit 12,836 miles last year, nearly 90,000 miles this year. Pretty tough old man yet, hardly fifty. The railroad says I am getting old. What is to become of us old ramblers?

Who wants to go in with me and get up the O.M.P., the old men's party of the United States of America, with I don't know how many members? Should we be joined together and stick, do not doubt the old ones can hold their own. Have often wondered who starts off the schools, pays the bulk of the taxes, raises the most of the families before he is forty-five. Also who does the most of the hard labor, and also skilled, in the different crafts before the age limit. Also believe the old ones pay the most pew rent in all the churches. The burden of government is carried by the middle aged. Still our own government will not give us a show after we are beyond a certain age. Neither will the corporations. Those who run for office don't need us, only on election day. That is the reason I would like to see an old man's party in this country. We can make some one sit up and take notice. Let's hear from some of you. I haven't any money and perhaps am short on brains, but it doesn't take much brains to say yes and no on election day.—B. W. COSTLOW, De George Hotel, Houston, Texas.

A Traveler Finds Us True

IT IS always gratifying to find that the authenticity which *Adventure* demands in the background and locale of its stories is appreciated by readers who know. Mr. Flude, who lectures about strange lands he has visited, recommends our stories.

For the past eight years I have been talking before schools and colleges. I thought you might be interested in knowing that in speaking to classes in English I always speak of *Adventure* as being a good red blooded magazine for young men to read; that I have found it accurate in its geographic and historic mention of foreign lands.

I believe that every worthwhile boy needs to stir his imagination with authentic literature of that sort. I was in Siberia for one year, in China, Japan, Lapland, etc. Have especially enjoyed the accurate color of some of your late stories in regard to Siberia. I congratulate you also in regard to your position in regard to love stories.—ALFRED LYMAN FLUDE

Going West, Old Man

IT'S about time you and I went out again, Johnny. Remember that first time, when we were in overalls—not bothered a bit by stock mergers, and banks, and the re-discount rate? The time Joe Loomis, Bill Hays, Lorrie Gartner and those two Injuns went with us, horseback, from Pocatello, Idaho, up through Jackson's Hole where the bear were thick—and then six weeks' riding through the Park? Didn't have any tourist buses then, Old-Timer. Nope. Old Faithful looked kind of different than she does now, all cluttered up with tourists and hot dog stands, like now. But they tell me she's still spouting every forty-eight minutes. You and I are still spouting—to each other—but we won't be doing it long, now. Seventy, are you? Hell, I'm seventy-two. You don't look your age, Johnny, I'll say that for you. But then, except for that one woman, you were always a bachelor—really, as well as according to law. Doesn't matter. Back there somewhere along the trail I left three wives. I loved them. Doesn't matter. They're in heaven, and laughing at you and me—at me, anyway. You'd be surprised how women are . . .

But the time Sallie, your granddaughter, threw that ball—remember, up on the third floor of your house?—I saw a little room off-side. I went in there. Suppose I shouldn't have done it, but I did, Old-Timer.

All pegged up on the walls, I saw some things I kind of recognized. There was that Sharps rifle—remember the gun you used when you saved my life, remember, when the Sioux were chasing us through the Blackfoot Mountains . . . ?

Huh, yes. Don't go and get all hot and buttered up over *that*, Old-Timer—because I owe you a hell of a lot more. You'll come out again with me? You'll notch your eyes on a couple of rifle sights?

Huh, you can't see so well? Johnny, neither can I. Somehow I always figured you could kill the game. Anyway, we can get us Injuns to do the killing of game.

I never could shoot—much—'cept when the redskins came after us. Once or twice then I did pretty well.

But we'll make the trip, won't we, Johnny? We'll ditch all these blue serge uniforms, and gold wrist-watches, and Yamatoya shirts? We'll leave our hand-made shoes and our silk underwear? We'll go?

Brother, don't mind me if I cry a little. That's the first *real* handshake I've had in about fourteen years. Not since they gassed Bobby at Ypres—you remember my kid Bobby? Darned gallant nut; he had to go in with the Canucks . . .

But we'll go West again, you and I. It won't be like it was, Old-Timer, but we'll shoot the last frayed shoestring. Here's a sort of recipe from our old friend Coteau Gene Stebbings. You and I both know the recipe as well as he does, but there may be others who would like to know how to make sourdough bread.

SOURDOUGH BREAD

Some ol' time or other, yuh gits yoo a leetle piece
O' kinda good soft bread dough, made outa reg'lar yeas'.
Then put her in a airtight an' slop on plenty water,
Yoo might put a cover on her, if yuh kinda thinks yoo oughter.
Naow set her out th' way in a kinda coolish spot,
Say underneath yore bunk, if it ain't too awful hot.
Yoo keep her thar right handy till yo're wantin' for t' bake,
Then for yore other makin's, this yere is wotcha take:

A half a peck o' red-dog—yoo best sift out th' weavels—
Or elst yoo might jes' cook it some, t' kill off them air evils.
Throw in a pinch or so o' salt, strain in a leetle water,
Naow go an' git yore sourdough, if yoo ain't already brought her.
Yoo stirs th' whole dang mess till yoo gits a nice smooth batch,
Then yoo sets her in a warm place t' let them germs all hatch.
An' when she gits t' bubblin', thet's when she's workin' right;
It usual takes about a day, or elst about a night.

Then in th' mornin', say, when yoo've done up yore chores,
Yoo sifts in some more red-dog t' kinda fill th' pores.
Naow run th' whole danged smear on a clean place on th' floor,
An' punch her in th' brewery for half a hour or more.
Add red-dog if she's sticky, more water if too dry,
An' keep on with yore punchin' an' yoo'll git thar by'n' by.
Naow put her in a bucket an' sit her in th' sun,
An' when she rises nex' time she'll shore be Number One.

Go git ol' Dutchey good an' hot, then slap her in a pan,
Be shore yo're savin' out a piece t' put back in yore can.
Shove her in th' oven an' don't fergit yore fire;
Thet's th' way t' make her right, or elst then I'm a liar.
Bake her 'bout a hour, mebbe a leetle more;
Watch her when she's gittin' brown; if she's burnin' ope' th' door.
Sourdough o' red-dog. Thet's th' punk for Me,
Yoo does jes' like I tell yuh, an then by cripes, yo'll see!

—COTEAU GENE STEBBINGS

Louis Lacy Stevenson

THE author of "Venable's Kid," a newcomer to *Adventure*, has been a newspaperman ever since he completed school. He has worked in various cities and has covered assignments all over the United States, also in Canada, Mexico and Europe, those assignments having included everything from floods and forest fires to traveling with Presidents and Royalty.

Frank Wead

ANOTHER newcomer to our authors' brigade is Frank Wead, whose story, "Fleet Action," appeared in the last issue. However, the last Camp-Fire was so taken up with the list of stories (to assist you in voting on your favorites for 1929) that Comrade Wead's brief speech of introduction had to be held over for a fortnight.

Educated U. S. Naval Academy; graduated 1916. Served on cruisers along the West Coast of Mexico and Central America, Panama, and the East Coast of South America. During war was in the S. Atlantic Patrol and in the Mine Force, which, working from Inverness and Invergordon, Scotland, laid the North Sea anti-submarine mine barrage.

Went into flying in 1919. Have about 1500 hours in the air, mostly fighting work. Had command of the American Schneider Cup Seaplane Racing Team that defeated France, Italy and England at Cowes in 1923. In 1924 in a single 15-hour flight with Lieut. J. D. Price, U.S.N., as co-pilot broke 5 world's seaplane records for duration, distance and speed. Have had command of various torpedo plane and fighting units and considerable staff work in the Aircraft Squadrons, Battle Fleet. Suffered a broken neck in 1926 and since then have been convalescing and writing. Not fond of the former but very keen about the latter, and expect to stick to it.

—FRANK WEAD

A Note From Dutch Flat

AS WINTER comes on Bill Adams considers the fulness of nature in the Sierras, and is content, though far from the sea.

Indian summer in the Sierras. Great colors. Brilliant sky. Still air. Dutch Flat is silent as mid-ocean save for now and then a bird note. When deep in the forest it is silent, save for now and then the scold of a gray squirrel. A big crop of acorns and wild berries. Bear, coons, squirrels are fat. Soon we'll have the snow flying. Haven't been in a snow country in nigh on thirty years. Don't know how it'll suit my bellows, but here I am and here I sticks.

—BILL ADAMS

More Evidence Against The Brown Bears

FROM Victor Shaw comes the following note, and clippings from Alaskan newspapers:

You might be interested in the enclosed clippings from local papers *in re* the depredations of our Brownies. I have just returned from a successful white goat hunt—got two.

—VICTOR SHAW

The Ketchikan *Chronicle* carries the news account of the tragic death of John A. Thayer, of the Forestry Service, at Eliza Harbor on the East Coast of Admiralty Island, when he was attacked by a Brown Bear. And the editorial in this paper in no uncertain terms denounces the vicious Brown Bear as a menace to the development of the country. Decrying the fact that so eminent an authority on wild life as Mr. Hornaday of New York is in favor of preserving the Brown Bear, the *Chronicle* says in its editorial:

That young man's (Thayer's) life was worth more to his country and to the world than all the brown bears living. Let us not always have laws protecting them. Rather, let us place such high bounties on them that they may all be exterminated.

And the Petersburg *Press* (which agrees with the Petersburg Commercial Club that the Brown Bear is hampering the work of pioneers, for the benefit of sportsmen) says:

Many of those who are so staunchly advocating additional protection for these animals have never so much as seen a brown bear, unless it was in a zoo, let alone ever having been in Alaska, the land where their sentimental and selfish meddling is doing so much harm.

Perhaps if their children were killed and the little mangled bodies mauled about and partially devoured as has happened in a number of well authenticated instances in Alaska, they might get a different viewpoint in the matter. No homesteader dares to take his family into some of the extremely desirable areas for this same reason. The unfortunate incident at Eliza Harbor last week only emphasizes a condition that is steadily growing worse. In recent years there has been at least one human

life lost each year because of the brownies and this summer several parties of berry pickers were injured by brown bears. It is not the hunters who are injured, but citizens of Alaska peacefully pursuing their efforts to build up the Territory.

The local business men believe this is a particularly opportune time to launch their campaign and are soliciting the aid of all business and civic organizations in the Territory.

The Old American Legion

HERE is the card:

AMERICAN LEGION, INC.
10 BRIDGE STREET NEW YORK CITY
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
Captain Aylward Egbert Dingle
HAS BEEN FOUND QUALIFIED AND IS ENROLLED
AS SERVICE MEMBER NO. 21126 OF THE
AMERICAN LEGION, INC., AND IS ENTITLED TO
WEAR ITS INSIGNIA.
ATTEST:

And in going through the roster one finds a host of famous names. Two Presidents of the United States, six eminent jurists, many Congressmen, lawyers, doctors, merchants and (I suppose) a few less reputable. But then, it was the old *Adventure* gang. Was there ever a better small aggregation of hardbitten, slow smiling men?

I never was a member, and would not grant myself a card just because I am editor of this magazine. But I have met about forty of the old brotherhood, and they are men, all men. What more can one say?

THE ROCKY TRAIL TO TOWN

We're the children of the open and we hate the
haunts of men,
But we had to ride to town to get the mail;
We're ridin' home at daybreak for the air is cooler then
All except the ones we left behind in jail.
Bill's off eye is dark and fadin',
Shorty's nose won't bear paradin',
All our toilets show a touch of disarray.
We're not fond of city life,
'Tis a constant round of strife,
But we're not the breed that's shyin' from the fray.

Hit 'er up, my buckaroos,
Let the desert hear the news
While the chaparral's a-quakin' all around;
We're plumb wicked to the marrer,
We're a midnight dream of terror
When we're ridin' up the rocky trail to town.

For we get our hasty tempers from our friends, the
centipedes,
From the rattlesnake we learn to guard our rights;
We gather fightin' pointers from our buckin' bronco
steeds,
And the bobcat teaches repartee that bites,
So when some white collared baron
Jeered the garb that I was wearin'
Then it don't take long to get where takin' ends;
And he ate his ill bred chat
With the sauce of derby hat
While my jolly partners entertained his friends.

Hit 'er up, my buckaroos,
Let the desert hear the news
Tell the stars the way we rub the haughty down;
We're the fiercest wolves a-prowlin'
And it's just our night for howlin'
When we're ridin' up the rocky trail to town.

Since old Abraham and Lot split the Jordan range
in halves
Just to fix it so the punchers couldn't fight;
Since Israel skinned his daddy-in-law of six years
crop of calves
And he hit the trail for Canaan in the night,
There has been a lust for battle
'Mong the men that follow cattle
And a way of doin' things that's wild and strange.
And 'tis said old Laban's words
When he missed his speckled herds
Still are useful in the language of the range.

Hit 'er up, Dame Nature's sons,
Leather fists and leather lungs
And we'll wear the brand of Laban like a crown;
We're the sons of desolation
We're the outlaws of creation
When we're ridin' up the rocky trail to town.

—SEVEN ANDERTON

The Tommygoff

A READER who read Mr. Clifford Pope's note on the bushmaster in the November 1st issue, in *Ask Adventure*, has some additional observations on the tommygoff. He's seen this venomous reptile in action.

The name tommygoff is applied by the West Indian negroes to a snake which is first cousin to the rattlesnake and which I do not believe is the true bushmaster of farther south. The tommygoff is not an aggressive snake, while I have the word of several

reptuable witnesses that the bushmaster is very distinctly so; also the tommygoff is very common in Guatemala on the Atlantic coast and ranges at least as far south as Panama.

The venom of this snake is a blood poison and tends to break up the red corpuscles in such a manner that the blood oozes out through the skin practically all over the body. I myself have seen a mule stand apathetically dripping blood in really large quantities. He had been bitten on the nose while reaching for some nice new grass around the base of an old stump. He died within twenty-four hours after being bitten. This business of oozing blood has led to weird tales of "blood snakes", which are all poppycock.

The largest tommygoff I ever saw measured seven feet and half an inch, and his head was approximately six inches long and four inches wide, very distinctly diamond shaped. He had lost one fang recently and had not grown a new one yet, but the remaining three, two on one side and one on the other, were fully an inch and a half long. He was killed by the boys in an engineer's party, doing work on a new land plantation in Panama.

—RICHARD MURDOCH

Gold

COMRADE WESTIN has the same sort of apparatus that George Allen England is employing on his treasure hunt. Knowing just how unreliable radio can be—even out on Long Island where the biggest sending stations of the world worry each other back and forth—I must ask to see results. But then, I am reminded of a small boy closely related to me. He was about five or six years of age, and in this small town had appeared gorgeous posters advertising "Forepaugh's Circus, The Greatest Show on Earth."

The ladies in tights were of no par value then to the kid. He gazed in awe at the lithographs of elephants, zebras, kangaroos and monkeys, however. He sniffed in scorn—swaggered a little. Such pictures simply never had appeared in this section of Arizona; and after all, the boy was not so dreadfully far wrong in his reasoning. It was rather strange that they ever did reach Arizona . . .

But the circus came, the lad went . . . and he saw his first elephant. After fully three minutes of consternation and awed silence on the part of the boy and the big, wrinkled bull, the elephant reached out its trunk and accepted a peanut from another one of its new boy friends.

"Oh, Dad—Daddy—did you see? It *moves!*"

And since that afternoon no one has been able to keep that boy—he's getting to be a man, now—away from any circus that comes to town.

I want to hear from adventurers who have in their possession any old treasure maps or data of buried treasures on the islands of the now famous Gulf of Fonseca.

Eighteen years ago an expedition, outfitted in Los Angeles, arrived here on the S. S. *Eureka,* but owing to revolution in Honduras, and other causes, they were not able to go on shore even on the islands. They returned back again and as now things have changed and I am in possession of a real Treasure Finding Machine, built on strictly scientific bases and using two stage audio amplifiers, I am now ready for a real treasure hunt on the islands, and should like to get in touch with any adventurer who has definite data of treasures buried down here.

My machine will actually indicate by sounds in the phones the presence of any buried metal underground, and each metal gives out a different tone so that with practice I am able to state, without digging, what kind of metal is buried. This is no fake, but God's real truth.

I will be pleased to enter in correspondence with above mentioned parties, and hope to hear from many of them.

Wishing *Adventure* a long life and a happy one, and with regards to brother adventurers, I remain,

Yours sincerely, —E. A. WESTIN

So when I remember that little boy, and how incredible the elephant appeared to him, I do not ask anything more than performance from anything new. I have ceased to be a skeptic. If this new jigger moves—or lies quiet and performs its work—I am ready to accept it. Quite more equably than I was ready to accept, some years agone, the (demonstrated) fact that the powerful and beautiful tenor voice of Enrico Caruso could be flung through the air, all the way from New York's Metropolitan, to the cumbrous, squawking thing my friend in Elk Rapids, Michigan, told me was a radio . . .

—ANTHONY M. RUD

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Kit

TOOLS for a South American prospecting trip.

Request:—"Three of us are thinking of going on a trip to South America to look around a bit. Of course, this is out of your territory but perhaps you will be kind enough to answer some questions for me. I understand what tools and what kind of an outfit to take, as I am acquainted with the country.

1. What would you suggest as the best kind of a test kit to carry?

2. What amount of each acid and how much mercury?

Anything further that you could tell me will be greatly appreciated."—J. CARLTON, Ilion, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—A test kit for minerals on a trip such as you contemplate will include only a few rather simple items:

A pocket magnet, a good magnifying glass, a strong knife, an iron mortar and pestle, a small geologist's hammer, and a smooth piece of iron one-sixteenth of an inch thick for testing malleability. Lay a specimen of gold, silver or copper between folds of thick paper and tap with hammer.

About all the chemicals and acids needed will be: the carbonate or bicarbonate of soda, nitrate of soda ($NaNo_3$), hydrochloric acid, nitric acid, alcohol, caustic ammonia (NH_4OH), also a solution of nitrate of cobalt. You'll need some roasting spoons, some deep and some shallow crucibles. A blast lamp is bully, if you pack gasoline anyway.

The roasting spoons are made of thin sheet iron,

covered with a thin even sheet of cement. Spoons are a bit larger than a silver dollar with a handle about 18 inches long. You can also make your crucibles from cement—the deep sort two inch deep and one-sixteenth inch thick, large as two bit piece at top and tapering slightly to bottom; the shallow kind one-half inch deep with the sides beveling out at an angle of 40°. Make with cardboard forms and pare to shape before cement has set hard.

The above will test for almost every sort of mineral you encounter. Of course, you'll have to have along a good mineralogy and a guide for testing. That of Alex. McLeod, is excellent, a book called "Useful Mineral & Rare Ores", sold for $2.50 by John Wiley & Sons, 440 Fourth Ave., N. Y. C. I would take a quart of each acid in glass bottles with glass stoppers. You could have them packed as demijohns are packed for safe carriage. A few pounds each of the other chemicals. About 15-20 lbs. of mercury in proper flask. Depends altogether on how much work you'll do, of course. The mercury will cost around $125 for a 76-lb flask and at retail sale will probably make it cost from $1.50 to $2.00 a lb.

If you sabe outfit, climate, etc., there is little else to mention, except that there is a mighty fine book published which you may find rather useful: "Mineral Deposit Of South America", by Miller & Singewald, costs $5.00, sold by McGraw-Hill Book Co.; 370 Seventh Ave., N. Y. C. Also, I advise taking a blowpipe outfit. Best wishes for success.

Scorpions

TWO ill-famed members of the spidery clan, whose bite is really not as bad as their reputations.

Request:—"I would appreciate very much whatever information you may be able to give me relative to the following:

1. The species and distribution of poisonous Arthropoda in the Mexican states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango. Is it true that scorpions are especially prevalent in Sinaloa and Durango?

2. What are the facts concerning the notorious vinagaroon of the arid Southwest?

3. Are there any works in English, Spanish, or French which deal with the entomology of the Northwest of Mexico, either in whole or in part?"

—DONALD D. BRAND, Berkeley, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Frank E. Lutz:—1. Scorpions, large spiders commonly called tarantulas, and centipedes occur rather generally throughout the Mexican states you mention except perhaps in the higher altitudes. I would not say that scorpions are especially prevalent unless, of course, you are comparing that region with, say, Berkeley. Then they are. However, if you are contemplating with some misgivings a trip there, be of good cheer. If practically naked natives who sit and sleep on the ground and live in huts made attractive for such Arthropods are not often hurt, much less killed, you will not be in much danger.

2. The name "vinagaroon" is applied to various, not very closely related things. Probably you have in mind the large "whip-scorpion" *Mastigoproctus giganteus*, which is related to but is not a true scorpion. Its thread-like tail has no sting and, while the creature can pinch with its other end, it is not so far as I have found out by inquiry and personal experience even midly disagreeable.

3. No. Unfortunately there is no work devoted to the entomology of the Northwest of Mexico. The large and expensive series of books published under the general title of "Biologia Centrali-Americana" comes the nearest to what you have in mind, but it is not very useful except to a specialist.

Motorcycles

DISINTERESTED comment on the advantages of particular makes.

Request:—"I would like to buy a motorcycle for all round purposes, city, highways and mountains. Which would you suggest—Ace, Henderson, Indian or Harley-Davidson? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?"

—BEN PALOW, Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—Of the various makes of motorcycles now on the market I prefer a twin cylinder machine, where maximum reliability and ruggedness are desired. Both the Indian and Harley-Davidson are good makes, and I have ridden both of them in the past.

Machines of the 4 cylinder type are very smooth in operation and quite flexible to handle, but where mountain climbing is necessary, and at the same time the altitude may be comparatively high, I believe that the twin machine is to be preferred.

As to which make of twin is the better, something depends of course on cost, and either one of the two aforementioned I am sure will prove satisfactory, although possibly the Harley-Davidson is a little more substantial than the Indian, but on the other hand, the present reputation of the Indians is that they are slightly faster. Here again this is a matter open to argument, where condition of the machines may easily offset any technical advantage one way or the other.

Coconut

A COMPREHENSIVE account of its culture and uses.

Request:—"1. How does one set about growing coco-palms? Do you plant the nuts or set out sprouts?

2. How is the ground cared for between the trees?

3. What kind of soil is required for coco-palms?

4. Can other crops be grown in the same orchard with coco-palms, such as soya beans, rice or what not?

5. What is the labor problem in growing coconuts? Can a man dispense with native labor by use of modern machinery?

6. To what use are the husks of the coconut put? I have heard that rope is made from the husks. What else is made from coconuts besides copra?"

—J. M. WHITAKER, Fayetteville, Ark.

Reply, by James S. Meagher:—1. The native method of planting a coconut tree is as follows: Out of a heap he picks out a sprouted nut, sets it in a shallow hole and leaves it uncovered. If a piece of old iron is handy he puts this in the hole along with the seed nut. Iron rust is beneficial to young trees. The nuts are not covered with earth for a year.

The regular method of plantation in commercial coconut enterprises is similar, except that the nuts are started in a nursery and planted out after one year. Nuts from heavy bearing trees are selected for the nursery and after being first cured require about three weeks to germinate. The seedlings after a year in the nursery are planted out in the plantation in wide deep holes placed at regular intervals.

A cover crop is usually grown. The palms come into bearing according to locality, climatic conditions, etc., in about from four to seven years. On the average the crop would not become self supporting until say the eighth year and would not begin to pay dividends until the ninth or tenth year.

2. The coconut has often been described as a lazy man's crop as it requires little cultivation. In commercial plantations, however, a good deal of weeding has to be done in order to insure a vigorous growth of the young palms.

The coconut palm grows almost everywhere in the South Sea Islands, but of course certain localities are much more favorable than others.

In certain areas in the islands on account of drouth there is no vegetation of any kind or at least to any extent, on account of the rainfall being most copious on the windward or southeasterly slopes of the hills. In the Marquesas, for instance, the southeasterly windward sides of the islands are heavily forested, whilst the leeward side is semi-desert.

Sandy or coral land is the most conducive to rapid growth of the coconut palm and requires but little weeding. It is however grown very successfully in inland areas of different soil formations. The palm seems to thrive near the sea however and fine specimens are seen with their roots almost in sea water.

4. It is of course possible to grow other crops between the palms on a plantation but it is not practicable. There is no market for such crops as could be grown in this manner. Such a crop as rice could not be grown together with a coconut plantation.

5. Labor is always a problem in the South Sea Islands. Orientals have been imported for several years now to meet the situation in some groups.

It is difficult to manage this class of labor without some knowledge of their different languages. Machinery is used to some extent on large plantations but the bulk of the labor has to be done by the natives

In normal times the crop is continuous, ripe fruit being on the tree ready for picking together with blossoms and green fruit. Such work as picking the fruit and husking the nuts has to be done by hand.

Many of the Chinese and Indo-Chinese imported into Tahiti have proven capable workmen and without them the labor situation would be indeed acute. The native Polynesian or Melanesian really does not have to labor, as he has his own land which is protected for him, this relieving him of the necessity of labor which from times immemorial he has regarded as the antithesis of the true enjoyment of life.

6. The coconut palm and the fruit thereof is the most precious gift of the gods to the natives of the South Sea isles. Where there are no coconuts there are no natives. It is the tree of life to them, providing meat, drink and shelter and many other benefits.

THE husks, or rather the fiber which surrounds the nut in the husk, is twisted into cord, and is used for every purpose where cord or rope is needed. As well as the copra of commerce the coconut provides material from which many articles are made and several by-products remain which are valuable for manufacture.

The green nut furnishes drink and a delicate meat similar to the white of an egg. There is a story of a lonely Englishman who discovered the fact that gin blended well with coconut milk and thus originated the coconut highball which is well known in Brazil and served even in the fashionable tea rooms there. Wine is substituted however for distilled liquors as a rule in the tropics when making this natural cocktail. The ripe nut as well as providing the copra is also of course a food for man either raw or grated and mixed with a variety of other foods. Coconut oil for the hair and skin is an essential part of the native's toilet requirements. The dried and polished shells make water bottles and oil flasks and a variety of ornaments.

The sap dripping from the severed stalk of the flower is sweet toddy and when fermented becomes *soma* toddy, an intoxicant. Leaves in the crown of the tree make a delicate salad, known as "sailors' cabbage" in the old days of the whalers. As the tree is destroyed by cutting these leaves, the salad is also known as "millionaires' salad" on account of the value of the tree. The stipule or sheath at the base of the leaf is used for all manner of mats and sacking, etc. The trunk of the tree is used for building purposes such as posts and rafters of huts and also for spear shafts and dugout canoes and many other things. Refuse of coconut fiber is used for fuel.

Some of the products of the coconut valuable in commerce are the glycerine obtained and used in the manufacture of munitions, vegetable butter, dessicated coconut, and the remains of the "cake" when the oil has been pressed out, which is excellent fodder or manure.

Ontario

MUSKRAT farming on tax-sale land.

Request:—"Seeing an ad in a magazine about land being sold for taxes in Canada, I sent for their list. The Parry Sound District seems good to me.

First, do you think it O.K. to buy land in this manner? Say I bought 100 acres, how about figuring on fruit, rabbit fur, or poultry farming? Would any of them pay? If I located on a lake or stream, what would you think of raising muskrats?"

—NORMAN A. KEMMERZELL, Baltimore, Md.

Reply, by A. D. L. Robinson:—There is a lot of tax-sale land in the Parry Sound District. because most of that land is too poor for farming and has been stripped of its timber. Of course, I could not possibly say that the land you have bought is of that nature, but some one has found it impossible to make a living from it, therefore has let the taxes go. I'll venture to say offhand, however, that most of the timber has been stripped from it; the rest rock and therefore untillable. That district though, abounds in lakes, streams, hills and valleys. But there is one thing for which that 100 acres of yours might be used for: MUSKRAT FARMING! That is one of the coming industries of this land of ours.

I wish I had the time and space to tell you of what Manitoba and Saskatchewan are doing to develop this industry, of the hundreds of acres of land that are being set aside for it and the quick returns from the industry. I favor it because, though I abominate all forms of cruelty, yet I know that furs will be worn so this is one humane way of providing for that want. Our wild fur is practically extinct save in the very far North (and this answers your question of trapping in the Parry Sound District) so that this is the way out.

Muskrat farming appeals to the man of small capital from the economy of establishment and the rapidity of getting under way. The natural increase of these little animals under protection, proper conditions of food, water, etc. is amazing. There are from three to five litters a year with an average of from six to ten in each litter, and the increase of a pair may be as high as 1,200 % in a year. One instance is cited of a ranch which was stocked with 800 muskrats and in 18 months was estimated to have 60,000 or in other words, 75 for every one placed on the ranch a year and a half before. One acre of well supplied marsh will sustain from 50 to 75 rats and their progeny.

Governments are giving this industry their moral support—in Canada, I mean. If you will write the Game Department of Ontario, House of Assembly, Toronto, Ont., for information concerning this industry, they will send you literature on the subject, I am told. It is said that 60% of fur coats are made from muskrats and marketed under various names. The muskrat shortage has for some time been reflected in the rising prices of peltry, and last year the world demand for these skins exceeded by 15,000,000 pelts the supply.

Poultry farming is risky and few make it pay. Turkeys are the hardest of all to raise. Fruit would not grow well in the Parry Sound District—too cold. Fish for one's own table but not for any income—too scarce. Rabbits? Hardly; could not well be enclosed. No pheasants or quail here; a few partridge, and these are becoming scarcer.

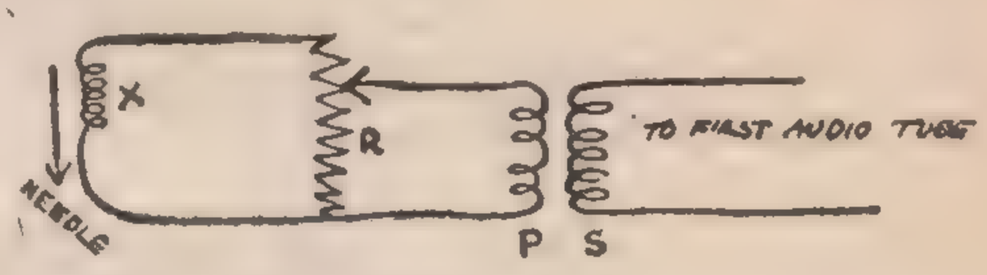
Radio

HOOK-UP for phonograph attachment.

Request:—"Kindly let me know if you can supply me with a diagram or explanation of a phonograph attachment such as is described in the advertisement from Montgomery Ward's catalog enclosed, and the methods of attaching it to a Knight 8/9 A. C. set, a Federal 5 tube D. C. set, and an Atwater-Kent 6 tube D. C. set."

—FRANK DENIER, Liberty, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—The usual method of connecting the phonograph pickup to its associated electrical apparatus is shown in diagram herewith. The coil X is the winding in the pickup itself.



The electric oscillations are generated in this coil due to the mechanical movements of the phonograph needle. The resistance R is connected across coil X. R is adjustable. The output leads are connected to the primary posts of the first audio transformer of the radio receiving set. All other circuits remain the same regardless of the type of radio receiver.

Skiing

AT THIS season of the year, when the snows invite the sport of "wooden wings", it seems fitting that Mr. W. H. Price, authority on skiing, should give a few salient pointers to beginners.

Flying through the air on a pair of wooden wings—that is skiing—and one of the most popular winter pastimes in Canada and many parts of the United States.

The snow birds, as ski enthusiasts are often termed, are now turning their thoughts to this wonderful and healthful winter sport, and hoping for the snow to come.

A few words to the beginner might not be amiss just at this time of the year. Don't buy cheap, ill-fitting skis. The expert keeps away from bargains, and the beginner would do well to follow suit. The price of skis varies, but those adapted for boys run

anywhere from five to ten dollars, and much higher, depending on quality and length. The length is very important. In selecting skis, get ones long enough so that when they are stood on end you can just close your fingers over the pointed end.

After you have snugly strapped them on, keep your skis parallel and close together; one foot should be slightly ahead of the other. Hold your body erect but not stiff, lean forward a little, with knees slightly bent and close together.

On ordinary snow you will not fall sidewise so easily, but a sudden decrease or increase in the grade of slope will easily throw you forward or backward if you are not careful. However, the closer you keep the skis together the more advanced you keep the leading foot, and the greater your speed, the less the tendency of losing your balance.

On hard-packed or crusty snow it is better to keep the skis about six inches apart, with one foot a little ahead of the other.

On level snow ski running is like walking. Hold the skis parallel, as mentioned above, and not more than three inches apart. Take long, easy strides, without lifting the ski off the snow. A pair of poles will help you keep your balance and increase your speed. Move then in time with your opposite leg, when you move the left ski forward, put the right pole forward.

Up a slight slope skiing is the same as travel on the level. As the slope increases you find it difficult to keep from sliding back. Shorten the steps, lift the toes of your skis about six inches from the snow and stamp them firmly into the snow at each step.

If the slope is too steep to go straight up, travel diagonally across it in a zig-zag trail. In side-stepping up a very steep grade, we raise one ski sidewise up the hill and bring the other up alongside, keeping the skis across the direction of the slope. This is a rather slow procedure, but sure.

Saddles

MR. EARNEST favors the double-rig, and in no uncertain terms.

Request:—"1. What sort of saddles are considered best for stockmen?

2. How do Gallup & Frazier rank as saddles?

3. Do you personally recommend single or double rig? If so why?

4. Are Mexicans considered good horsemen?

5. How do "Mex" saddles compare with our make?

6. What does a good one cost and who sells them?"

—PETER B. CROWLEY, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—1. Regular stock saddle.

2. Gallup and Frazier saddles rank very well and they make a very good saddle but my opinion was that their saddles are all together too heavy.

3. I recommend a double-rig saddle, because having used centre-fire, three-quarter-rig, Spanish-rig, and double-rig saddles, I have found the double-rig stays put far better than any of the others, and you don't have to worry about your saddle turning if you tie on to a four-year-old steer and he gets a side run on you. I don't think any man having any real regard for horse flesh would ever use a single rig saddle because you have to cinch them up so tight that you dang near cut a horse in two.

4. Yes, Mexicans are good horsemen.

5. Mexican saddles compare very favorably with our make of saddles.

6. A good saddle costs from sixty dollars up to several hundred dollars. The higher price ones being ornamented of course with silver. F. A. Meanea, Cheyenne, Wyoming, makes in my opinion the best saddle made. He will send you catalogues on request. R. T. Frazier, Pueblo, Colorado; Knox and Tanner, Rawlins, Wyo.; Fred M. Stern, San José, Cal.; D. W. Horner, Heppner, Oregon, are some of the concerns who make saddles.

Lignum Vitae

A TROPICAL wood so hard it is used for pulleys, machinery bearings, ten-pin balls—and as this reader suggests—policemen's clubs.

Request:—"Would it be possible to have shipped to me one piece of Lignum Vitae wood from the Tropics, about three feet by three inches square?

When I was in Haiti in nineteen twenty-two with the U. S. Marines we of the Military Police carried batons of this wood, and now I should like to get a piece to be turned down on a lathe after the pattern of the batons now in use by the Chicago Police, of which I am a member.

I should be indebted to you if you will tell me where I must send for it and whether I shall have to pay duty on it and what way I must have it sent to me." —H. W. HAWELKA, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. William R. Barbour:—I am well acquainted with Lignum Vitae, for I myself have spent several years in Haiti. It is one of the hardest and heaviest woods in the world, and is fine for turning, for it contains a natural oil which sort of lubricates the turning tools, and gives it a polish without any further work.

Offhand, I can not think of any people in Haiti who could get your wood for you except the Marine Corps itself. Why don't you write to the Commanding Officer, 2nd Regiment, U. S. M. C., Port-au-Prince, Haiti, explain that you were once with the Corps in Haiti, are now with the Chicago Police Force, and would be very glad if he would refer your letter to some enlisted man or non com who is soon returning to the States. Such a returning Marine could bring your piece of wood without being bothered with the red tape of consular invoice, freight and forwarding charge, etc. He could bring it with his baggage and mail it when he reached the States.

I should think one dollar would cover cost of the wood and mailing charges.

Isle of Pines

IS A little agricultural community that has never seen frost.

Request:—"Can you tell me about the Isle of Pines, south of Cuba?"

—H. S. CARMICHAEL, Orlando, Fla.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The Isle of Pines which is politically a part of the Province of Havana, is 12 hours from Havana (rail to Batabano, Cuba, thence by steamboat to Isle of Pines). Communication is six times a week both ways. There is also a schooner from Tampa, Florida, to Nueva Gerona (554 miles) about once a month.

The area of the island is 795 square miles. The northern two-thirds, with pine and hardwood timber and generally suitable for agriculture, is flat or undulating with several small mountain ranges. Rivers and springs are numerous and the rainfall (chiefly May-October) is abundant. The normal extremes of temperature are about 51 and 96, frost being unknown. There is no malaria. The southern third, connected with the northern part by a narrow peninsula, contains hardwoods but is generally not suited for agriculture.

The population in 1919 was 4,228. Spanish is spoken by the majority of the population, but as commerce, agriculture, transportation and banking are mainly conducted by Americans, English is the chief language of business.

Nueva Gerona, the business center with a population of about 1,200, and Santa Fé, 12 miles distant, are the only towns. Other settlements, with distances from Nueva Gerona, are: Santa Barbara, 13 miles; McKinley, 7½ miles; Los Indios, 20 miles; and Columbia, 8½ miles.

The principal business is growing citrus fruits and vegetables. Grapefruit and peppers, egg-plant and other vegetables, are exported to the United States. Oranges and melons are grown mostly for the Havana market.

Stockraising (cattle and hogs), dairying and poultry raising are of some local importance. There are several saw mills and a box factory. A small quantity of tobacco is grown. No sugar cane is raised.

The leading imports (mostly American goods) are necessities and articles used in farming, such as fertilizers, agricultural implements and machinery, crate material, feed, motor vehicles, foodstuffs, hardware and dry goods.

From 150,000 to 220,000 crates of grapefruit are exported annually to the United States, and from 30,000 to 40,000 crates to Canada and England. The shipping season begins in August and ends in June. The export of fresh vegetables, all of which go to the United States from December to May, inclusive, vary from 50,000 to 150,000 crates a year.

Nueva Gerona has a wireless telegraph station. A local telephone company serves the northern portion of the Island. Letter postage from the United States is 2 cents an ounce.

There are no railroads, and local transportation is mostly by motor vehicle. There are 230 automobiles and 120 trucks on the island. The English and Spanish language publications of Havana circulate on the island.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, JANUARY 15th

RAFAEL SABATINI

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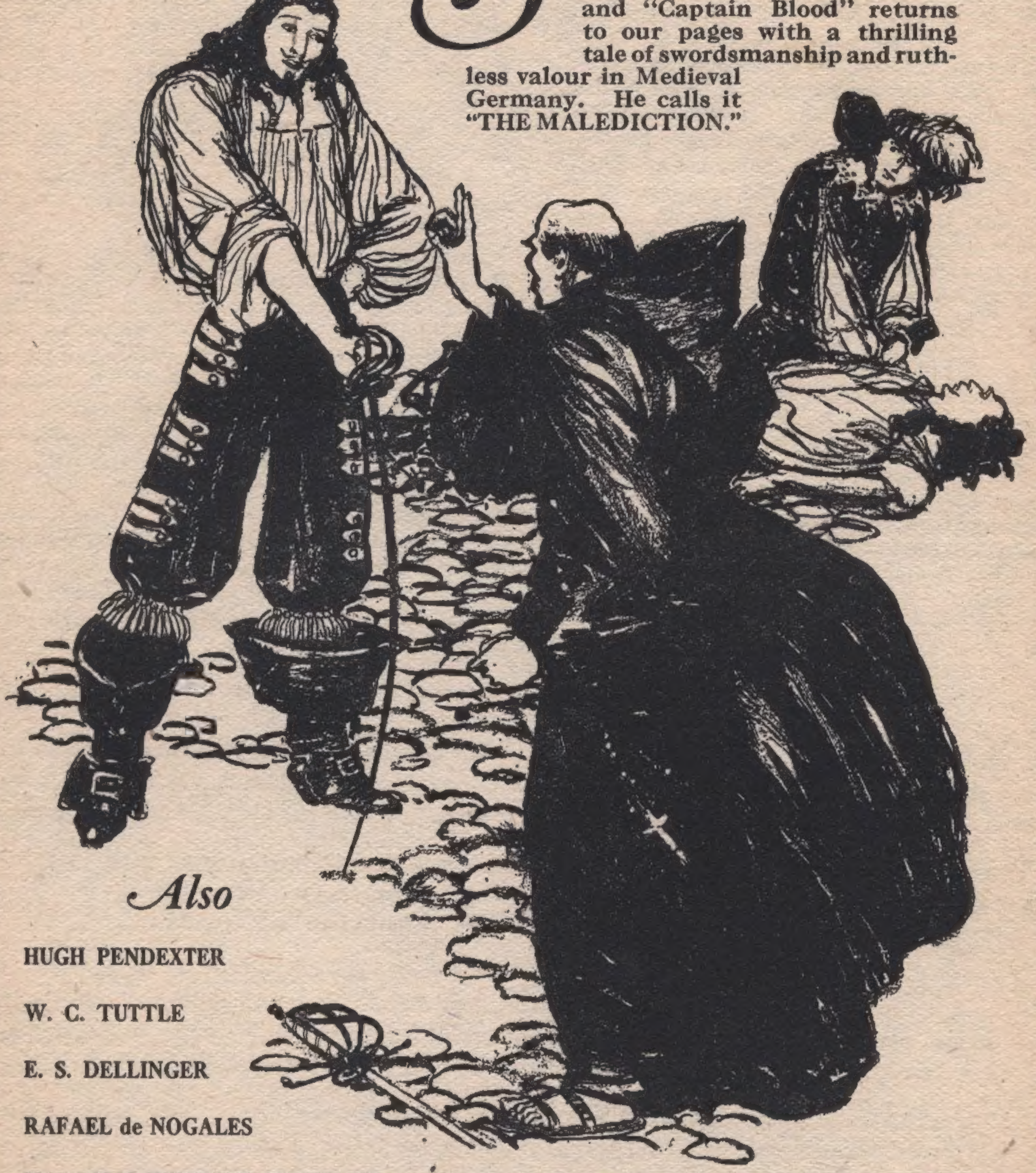

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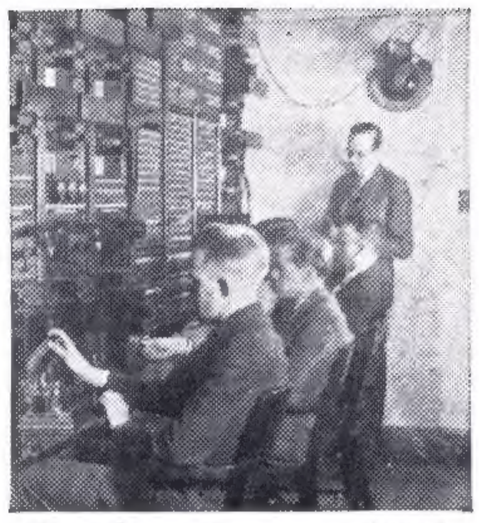
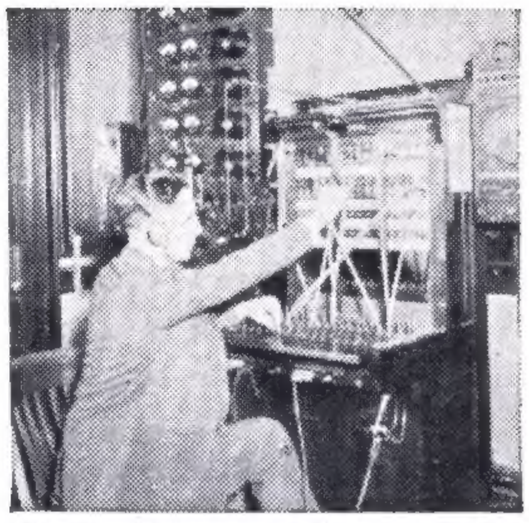


Broadcast Operators $1800 to $4800 a Year.



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